TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS

BY LEO EDWARDS

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TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS

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A HAPPY DOG IN A HAPPY HOME—THAT WAS ME ALL RIGHT.

TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS
THE TRIGGER BERG BOOKS
THE TUFFY BEAN BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
BERT SALG

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To

a swell little guy, the original "Short Change"
of this story, who plays the piano, sets the
girls' hearts a-flutter, and falls over
his own feet. Cambridge, Wis-
consin, is his home town,
and his name is

BUD COWIE

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LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a complete list of Leo Edwards' published books:

THE TUFFY BEAN SERIES

Tuffy Bean's Puppy Days
Tuffy Bean's One-Ring Circus
Tuffy Bean at Funny-Bone Farm

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy
Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat
Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure
Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen
Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog
Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg
Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave
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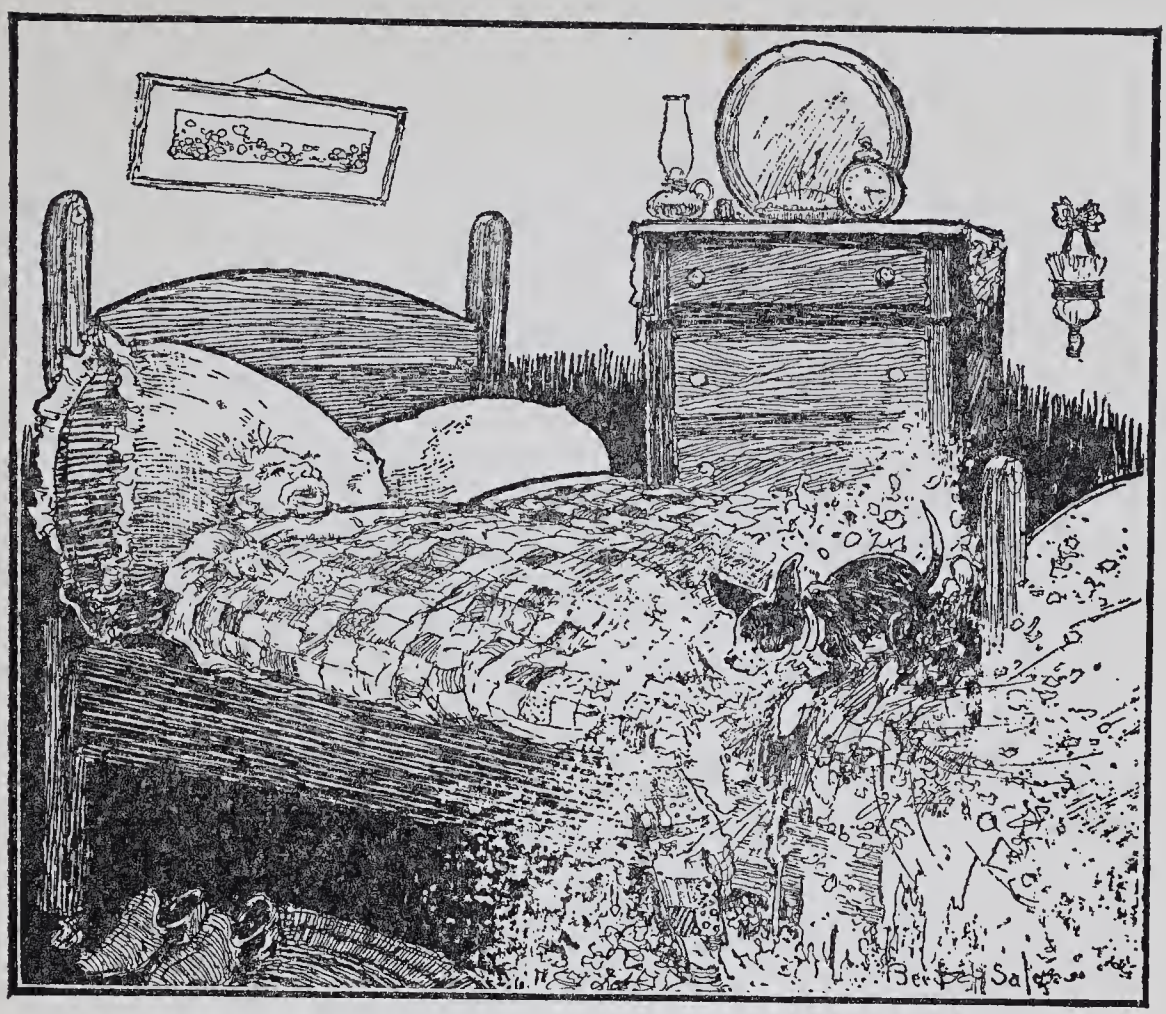


My only chance was to get under the covers quick!

TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS

CHAPTER I

HOW I GOT MY NAME

When I was four weeks old I swallowed a bumblebee with a yellow rumble seat. Suffering cats! I never knew till then that bees carried pitchforks. What that busy little honey hound did to my insides was plenty for little Tuffy.

My ma said then, sort of disgusted-like, as she pulled a burr out of her tail, that I was the dumbest pup she ever raised. And my pa, who was kind of proud of me for having the nerve to snap at the bumblebee, said I was the toughest. At that time we were living with a farmer named Mr. Bean. So now you know why everybody calls me Tuffy Bean.

As for being the dumbest pup in our family—well, I think you'll find out before you get through with this story, and others like it, that I'm a pretty smart dog. For how could a dog write a series of books if he wasn't smart?

I had an awful tussle with that pesky bumblebee. Man, oh, man! Mr. Bean thought I was having a fit. Grabbing me he chucked me into a pail of water, his spectacles jiggling excitedly on the end of his big warty nose. My, how he puffed! Then he had to hold me up by the tail to drain the water out of me. I sure was a wreck.

What I needed, my pa said, in his kindly way, was education. So the next day my ma brought me a shoe, telling me to smell of it. It was Mr. Bean's shoe, she said. When given Mrs. Bean's

shoe I could easily tell them apart. Then I was taught to tell a dead rat from a piece of cheese. I asked my ma why it was that Mr. Bean's shoes smelt so much like a dead rat. But she couldn't answer that.

Thereafter I used to spread out beside Mr. Bean, as he sat in his overalls on the farmhouse porch, and smell of his shoes. Such a heavenly smell! In time he and I became good friends. He taught me to sit up, to speak, and to roll over. Also he bought me a brass collar on which my name was engraved. And one summer's night when Mrs. Bean was sitting up with a sick neighbor lady, whose stomach had been sent away to a hospital to be revarnished or something, he let me sleep with him.

"But, whatever you do, Tuffy," says he, sort of grinning at me with those friendly gray eyes of his, as he and I curled up contented-like on the big feather tick, "don't you dare to go near this bed when my wife gits home. Fur she's turribly purticular, she be. An' if she ever caught you messin' 'round on her bed she'd grab you by the tail an' tie seventeen kinds of knots in it."

At that time my tail wasn't very long, for I

was just a rollicking pup. And I doubted greatly if Mrs. Bean, however much she knew about knots, could tie two of them in my tail, much less seventeen, as Mr. Bean said. But he was my best friend. He knew a lot of stuff that I didn't know. So the thing for me to do, I sensibly decided, was to obey orders.

I had the lower half of the bed to myself, which was the best part, for that's where Mr. Bean's feet were. I lay on the covers. But what was a few separating covers to nice strong feet like his! I got as close to them as I could. Then, with a deep stomachy sigh, which was my way of showing how much I enjoyed my new bed, I curled up and went to sleep.

Pretty soon I woke up. And was I ever scared when I heard a tiger in the room! For I knew something about tigers, having made the acquaintance of a neighbor dog who earlier had traveled with a circus. Give a hungry tiger a nice fat puppy, I had been told, and he was happier than a boy with an all-day sucker. And how lovely for me that I was the fattest pup of the bunch!

My only chance, I saw, was to get under the

covers, and do it quick. So I started digging. And all the time the tiger was going: "Gr-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r!" Pretty soon I came to Mr. Bean's bare feet. But I didn't stop there. I kept right on. And soon I came to the feather tick.

I could feel the feathers flying around me like leaves in a hurricane. Then something grabbed me. But it wasn't the hungry tiger, as I first suspected. Instead, it was Mr. Bean himself.

Still hanging to me by the tail, he jumped stiffly out of bed, thinking, I guess, that all bedlam had been turned loose in his room. Then, bumping into the dresser, he dropped me and lit a lamp, later collapsing into a chair when he got a look at the feathers which lay an inch deep all over the room, like new-fallen snow.

"I swan!" he muttered, with bulging eyes. "I swan! Now I *am* in a mess." Hunching his shoulders and pushing out his chin whiskers he angrily took after me, chasing me stiff-legged around and around the snowy landscape. "Confound your measly hide," he roared. "What got into you, anyway? Did you think you was some kind of a four-legged excavatin' machine?"

Half of the time I was hidden in the snow banks, which saved me from his hands, but I wasn't so sure that I'd similarly escape the tiger:

Yet where *was* the tiger? He wasn't under the bed. Nor was he in the closet where Mr. and Mrs. Bean kept their Sunday clothes.

Puzzled, I then felt foolish as the truth of the situation dawned on me. What I had mistaken for a hungry tiger was in reality Mr. Bean playing a raspy tune with his snoring apparatus.

Talk about a *dumb-bell!* I sure was it, all right, with a capital "D." For a moment or two I was sick all over, so complete was my mortification.

A terrible howl then arose as my hairy-legged pursuer kissed a corner of the bed with his pet corn. I felt sorry for him, of course. For I loved him. But I was much too smart to hang around him just then. For I knew well enough what he'd do to me if he once got his mitts on me. And hoping that he'd forgive me, when his temper cooled off, I beat it through the kitchen to the barn, the unhooked screen door banging behind me.

My ma growled at me when I woke her up.

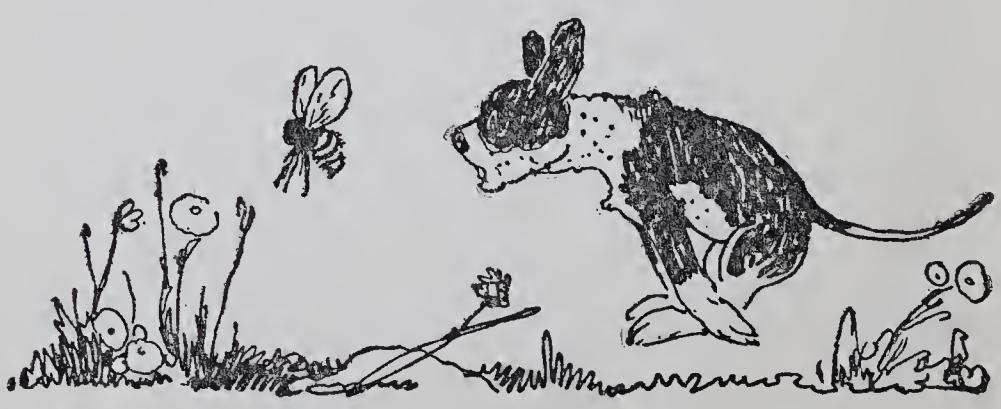
And later, having heard my story, she and my grinning pa sat under Mr. Bean's lighted window and listened while he played hide-and-seek with the galloping feathers. Trying first to sweep them into a pile, he finally had to pick them up one by one. And every time he bent over, the tail of his long nightshirt sort of scooting up behind, thus exposing his lanky, hairy legs, he said things about me that wouldn't look well in print.

Mrs. Bean gave him Hail Columbia when she got home the following morning, the refinished stomach having arrived from the hospital in due time. For her sharp eyes detected stray feathers here and there. And *she* knew, all right, what had happened. For this wasn't the first time that the guilty-acting husband had taken a pet dog to bed with him. I overheard them talking about it, only Mrs. Bean, having the best pair of lungs and the quickest tongue, did most of the talking. But Mr. Bean, I'm glad to say, wasn't angry with me now. And when his wife tried to find out which of the new pups was guilty, wanting, I guess, to put on a nimble little punishing act of her own, he let on, as he dug

vague-like at his shaggy head, that he couldn't remember. Nor could I ever make him understand why I dug a hole in the feather tick. Dogs understand each other. But it's hard at times to make our beloved masters understand us. Which is the one thing I don't like about being a dog.

To this day Mr. Bean thinks I was digging up gophers in my sleep. He often speaks about it when we're alone, sort of chuckling to himself. And wanting to enlighten him I've repeatedly growled at him tiger-fashion. But with no success. So why say any more about it? The feather tick having been properly repaired, Mrs. Bean has quit scolding about it. And having forgiven me, Mr. Bean loves me just as much as ever.

So that's that.



So we got behind the organ and howled.

CHAPTER II

HOT BISCUITS

OF ALL my brothers and sisters, of which there were six, I liked my brother Cobby the best. For he was full of fun. And he looked funny, too, with that crazy little tail of his sticking out behind like a wabbly clothes-pin. No wonder he was named Cobby! He had a spotted vest,

too, and pretty white slippers. But that tail! Suffering cats! It completely spoiled his looks. Many masters, I dare say, would have put the offending tail on a chopping block and given it an ambitious whack with the family hatchet. For that's the custom. Even nice people seem to think it's all right to dock dogs' tails. But I don't. According to my notion, dogs' tails should be left the way God made them. It hurts a dog to have his tail cut off. So why make the poor animal suffer merely to improve his looks? I believe I'd lose my self respect if I lost part of my tail. For it's a good-looking tail, I want you to know. I'm proud of it. And I've always been glad that Mr. Bean had the right ideas on the subject. *Him* cut off a dog's tail? Not on your life!

Good old Mr. Bean! No matter what happens to me in later years, or what happens to him, I'll always love him. I'll always love Mrs. Bean, too. For she's a good woman, even if she does sock me with a broom, telling me, in her sharp way, to get out of the kitchen and stay out. The place for dogs, she says, is in the barn. But Mr. Bean has different ideas. And when

his wife's back is turned he frequently opens the door for us, telling us to hurry up and crawl under the stove.

Which explains how Cobby and I happened to be snoozing in the kitchen the day Squire Popover and his talkative wife drove into the farmyard in their rickety car, my pa barking at it on one side and my ma on the other.

"Laws-a-me!" says Mrs. Bean, recognizing the car. "It's Squire Popover and his wife. Get up quick, pa," she shook her husband, who was taking his regular afternoon nap. "And if they stay to supper," came the added injunction, "for goodness' sake go easy on the bread, for I haven't but three slices in the house."

Mr. Bean was still half asleep.

"What house?" says he stupidly, rolling his eyes like a sick cow.

"Oh, dear!" says Mrs. Bean, sort of despairing-like. "Don't you know anything at all, pa? Numskull that you are, the wonder is to me that I ever married you." Then she gave him another shake. "It's Squire Popover, I tell you. The man who has the mortgage on our farm. He and his wife just drove into the yard in

their old car, which made enough noise to awaken the dead, but, of course, it wouldn't awaken *you!* There! They just got out. Why! . . . Look, pa! She's got a new hat. Velvet, too. And *what* a color for a woman of her age! But her taste always was in her mouth. Quick, pa. Run upstairs and get that ten-cent vase that they gave us last Christmas. But be sure and dust it off before you put it on the center table in the parlor."

Outside the house my ma and my pa were sniffing the newcomers up one side and down the other, the woman acting as though she was in momentary fear of having a leg chawed off. Then there was a rap on the door, following which Mrs. Bean and the lady visitor flew into each other's arms. I thought maybe the man would get a hug, too. But he didn't.

There was a lot of talk in the parlor. Mrs. Bean wanted to know all about Mrs. Popover's relatives, particularly an aged aunt who had cholera morbus in her spinal column or something, and in return Mrs. Popover asked all kinds of polite questions about the Bean family. The men, too, got in a few words now and then,

but lapsed into discreet silence, thus giving Mrs. Bean the center of the stage, when the latter learned that Aunt Hulda Popover, in addition to having cholera morbus of the spinal column, also had heart trouble and water on the brain.

Asked to play and sing, Mrs. Popover then draped herself on the wabbly organ stool. Maybe her singing was all right. But it kind of hurt my ears. So I was glad when my ma and my pa parked themselves outside the open window and began to howl.

"Let's help them," says Cobby eagerly.

So we got behind the organ and howled to beat the cars, sort of working in a lot of extra growls and funny squeaks. But our squeaks and growls dried up like hunks of pancake batter on a red-hot stove when Mrs. Bean took after us with her broom, Mr. Bean in the meantime having swished himself outside at a fifty-mile-a-minute gait to throttle my ma and my pa.

After which the parlor concert went merrily on, Mrs. Bean never suspecting that Cobby and I had found a safe hiding place under the flour bin in the kitchen. It was kind of dusty there. And when I got a look at Cobby I almost

laughed my head off. For his spotted vest was entirely white now. And he had a white tassel on the end of his black tail. He sure looked funny.

"It's the flour," says he, kind of sneezing.

"Sh-h-h-h!" says I quickly. "Don't let Mrs. Goliath hear you."

According to history, Goliath was a hard-boiled giant who had a mean habit of messing up his enemies with a club. So you see, easily enough, why I called our mistress Mrs. Goliath. For old Goliath himself wasn't any handier with his club than she was with her broom.

There was another burst of grand opera from the parlor. And then who should knock on the back door but Henny Bittle, a neighbor kid.

I like Henny. For he carries stuff to eat in his pockets. Sometimes it's cookies. And sometimes it's just bread crumbs. One time he had a fried fish in his pocket. I liked that the best of all. Nor does he smell like a cake of soap, which is another thing that I like about him.

"I bet you're glad," says he, sort of beaming at Mrs. Bean, as he parked himself on a kitchen chair.

"Glad of what?" says she.

"That I'm going to eat supper with you," says he brightly.

"Not to-night, Henny," says she hastily. "For I've got other company."

"Who?" Henny curiously let out his neck.

"Squire Popover and his wife."

"Aw, shucks!" came the disappointed exclamation.

Here Luella Bittle, Henny's twin sister, appeared at the back door.

"Did Henny tell you, Mrs. Bean?" the words were spoken eagerly.

"Tell me what?"

"That we're going to eat supper with you."

"Laws-a-me!" says Mrs. Bean, sort of clutching her head. "I hope the whole Bittle family isn't headed over here."

"After missionary meeting this afternoon, ma's going to a card party," informed Luella talkatively. "And she told us to eat supper with you, Mrs. Bean."

"Well, of all things!" gasped Mrs. Bean.

"What are you going to have?" quizzed Luella hungrily.

"I can tell you better what we *won't* have," says Mrs. Bean, kind of grim-like, "and that's bread. For I haven't but three slices in the house."

"Oh, goody, goody!" cried Luella, clapping her hands. "We'll have baking-powder biscuits. For I can make swell biscuits."

"Yah," says Henny, crooking his freckled nose, "the kind of biscuits *you* make roll around in a fellow's stomach for a week."

"Please, Mrs. Bean," coaxed Luella. "Can't I make some biscuits for supper? You'll be surprized."

"*And* how," says Henny dismally.

Told then that Squire Popover and his wife were in the parlor, Luella wanted to get out the mixing bowl right away.

"Honest, Mrs. Bean, there isn't anything that Mrs. Popover likes better than baking-powder biscuits. She told me so the last time she ate supper at our house."

"And did she eat!" contributed Henny eloquently.

"Well," Luella drew herself up, "I am sure the biscuits were unusually good, for I made

them myself. So why shouldn't she eat?"

"I bet she had to see a doctor afterwards," says Henny.

"Ma counted eleven," Luella further informed, referring to the quantity of biscuits the visitor had consumed. "But I counted thirteen. And pa declares it was fifteen."

"Add 'em up," says Henny ingeniously.

"Goodness gracious!" says Mrs. Bean, sort of nervous-like. "Did she really eat that many?"

"When she eats," Henny sort of flopped the words down with a bang, "she eats."

"But don't say it so loud, child," Mrs. Bean showed further anxiety, as she stretched her ears in the direction of the parlor where the concert had tapered off into complete silence. "For what if she happened to hear you?"

"I should worry," says Henny brazenly. "For I never liked her anyway."

"I know what's the matter with *you,"* put in Luella. "You're just sore because she took a frog away from you in Sunday school."

"It wasn't a frog," corrected Henny. "It was a toad."

The pictures and doo-dads in the parlor were

then favored with another spasm of grand opera.

"The poor organ," sighed Henny, covering his ears.

But Luella had the soul of a poet.

"Music is wonderful," she breathed.

"Yah," says Henny, *"music."*

"If I could sing like that," says Luella dreamily, "I'd be in heaven."

"That's were you'd be, all right," say Henny grimly, "if you ever tried it."

"Tut! Tut!" says Mrs. Bean. "If you *must* stay to supper, quit your quarreling and do something useful. Henny, you can get some radishes out of the garden. And if that job doesn't overtax your strength, suppose you try picking some strawberries. As for you, Luella, there's the flour bin and there's my lard can. I've heard from your ma that you *can* make fine baking-powder biscuits. But be unusually careful to-night, child. For while we all know what spongers the Popovers are, getting their meals first at one farmhouse and then at another, I wouldn't want them to leave here and say that we tried to ruin their digestive organs."

During the later supper preparations Mrs. Bean, who weighs almost twice as much as her husband, trotted heavily back and forth between the kitchen and the parlor, wanting to be as courteous as possible to her guests. Then, when supper was ready, they all sat down to the laden table, Mrs. Popover and her lanky husband on one side and Henny and his sister on the other.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Popover, getting her eyes on the plate of hot biscuits. "Aren't they perfectly delicious."

"Luella made them," says Mrs. Bean, from her place at the head of the table.

"Imagine! And she's such a little girl, too."

"You ought to see her feet," put in Henny, with a mouthful of prunes.

Then, as the talkative visitor took one of the biscuits and buttered it, later reaching for the honey, he started counting:

"One," he hissed in his sister's ear.

There was an interval of intensive eating during which Henny emptied the pickle dish.

"Two," he hissed, keeping his eyes on the vanishing biscuits.

Mrs. Bean came back to the table with more pickles.

"Three," hissed Henny presently.

Choking on a pickle, he forgot where he left off.

"How many was it?" he inquired of his sister.

"Three," she hissed back.

Mrs. Bean looked kind of uneasy.

"Please don't whisper at the table, children," says she, giving the twins a meaning glance.

Completely mesmerized by the moving biscuit plate, Henny followed it with his eyes every time it changed hands, his lips forming unspoken numbers. Then, forgetting himself, he counted out loud.

"Eleven," he hissed to his equally attentive sister.

"He's checking up on Mrs. Popover," Cobby told me, as he and I peeped through the dining-room door.

"Sure thing," says I, having noticed that the watcher raised his count every time the gabby visitor took another biscuit. "I catch on."

Here Mrs. Bean got her eyes on us.

"Why," says she, springing to her feet, "there's those mischievous pups now. They gave me the slip in the kitchen."

Luella had good eyes.

"They're covered with flour," she cried. "They've been in the flour bin."

Mrs. Popover looked at the empty biscuit plate. Then, sort of clutching at the pit of her stomach, with its cargo of biscuits and honey, she staggered to her feet.

I saw what was worrying her. She thought that Cobby and I had just crawled out of the flour bin, Luella having taken the needed flour from the bin without noticing us.

Wanting the white-faced visitor to see that I was only sprinkled with flour, proof in itself that I had been *under* the bin instead of *in* it, I cantered into the dining room.

But I merrily cantered out again, with my tonneau sort of cutting the corners on high gear, when Mrs. Bean took after me with her broom.

And this time, let me tell you, she *did* put us out of the house, and I don't mean maybe. So I can't tell you what happened in the dining room after that.

Nor would my ma let me chase the visitors' rattling car when they started for home. That wasn't good manners, she said. And then, can you imagine it, she lit out down the lane lickety-cut, barking like a house afire!

Which shows you that dogs, like people, don't always practice what they preach.

Still, my ma is all right. Don't you get the idea that she isn't. I love her. I wouldn't trade her for any other ma in the whole world. I feel the same way about my bully good pa, too. I love them both, and always shall.

A happy dog in a happy home! That was me, all right. Nor did it occur to me, as Cobby and I played together day after day, so merry and care-free, that soon we would be separated.

Strange and exciting adventures lay ahead of me, the like of which few dogs have experienced. But I won't say any more about that now. Instead, I'll tell you what happened to Cobby and me the day we went hunting.

Gosh! Did *we* ever get into a mess! And then, in the end, what a disappointment! But that's all in a lifetime, I suppose.

Such a ky-yiing you never heard.

CHAPTER III

LOST IN THE FOREST

EARLY one morning in July my ma lined us up behind her, telling us, as she cuffed Cobby for jumping at her tail, that she was going to take us into the forest and teach us how to hunt.

I guess you can imagine how tickled we were. For dogs are natural hunters. And

Cobby and I in particular had been anxious to learn how to do it. Our pa could tell some wonderful stories about his early hunting days, for he had been born in the northern part of Wisconsin where bears roamed the woods. One time a bear that he was chasing turned on him and hugged him. But it wasn't the kind of a hug that boys and girls are used to. I guess not! When a bear hugs it hugs to kill. And the wonder is that my poor pa didn't pass out then and there. But he was tough, I guess. (Like me—huh?) And later on, when the bear had been shot, he had the satisfaction of chawing its tail off. Or was it a pair of ears? Anyway, he chawed off something. I've heard so much stuff that it's hard to remember everything.

Cobby has big ideas. But we all laughed at him when he told us that he was going to bag an elephant. He would be lucky, we said, if he bagged a chipmunk instead. After which he started hunting for a hippopotamus, determined to carry off the day's honors. That's Cobby for you! No wonder we love him dearly, conceited, daring little rascal that he is.

Leaving the barnyard, with it's familiar objects, chief among them the watering trough that Mr. Bean had made out of an old cracked bath-tub, we crossed a meadow, my ma leading the way and my pa bringing up the rear. Pretty soon we came to a creek. Pausing here, on a grassy bank, we squinted at the minnows as they flipped their shiny tails at each other in the clear water. If need be, my ma said, we could live on minnows such as these, though, of course, nature had provided other food more to our liking. And then she explained the changes that civilization had brought about in the lives of domestic animals. No longer did dogs have to forage for their own food, she said, though, years ago, when men and women lived in caves with skins wrapped around them (meaning the men and women, of course, and not the caves), that was the way a dog kept himself alive. Either he had to hunt or go hungry. And so, to this day, notwithstanding their changed circumstances, dogs of the better sort prided themselves on their hunting ability.

"So listen to what I tell you," my ma wound up. "We're leading an easy life now, as I say.

But there's no telling when we may have to go back to the old way of living and forage for our own food. So it's well to know how to do it."

Picking out a shallow spot.we then forded the creek, Cobby entertaining us with more of his big talk. He could smell gorillas, he said. And then he told us how he was going to hide in a tree and spit in their eyes. They would think it was a cloudburst. And when they were half-drowned he'd tie their legs together and drag them into his lair. Which, he wound up, sort of patting himself on the chest, was the proper way to capture gorillas.

Then did we ever laugh when he fell backwards into the creek, where a crawfish fastened itself to his funny little tail. Such a ky-yiing you never heard in all your born days. Nor did he get any sympathy from my ma or my pa.

If he did less bragging and more sensible thinking, my ma told him bluntly, as he gave the determined crawfish a free ride through the underbrush that lined the creek bank, he'd be better off.

Then, the crawfish having been dislodged, we all entered the deep, shady forest, my ma telling

us now to step lightly and keep our eyes peeled for possible game.

All I saw was crickets and grasshoppers. Still, I could *smell* things. So I didn't lose hope. Stopping at a burrow my ma sniffed. It was a woodchuck den, she said. But there was no use waiting for the woodchuck to come out, for most woodchucks slept days and foraged nights. Asked then why she hadn't brought us here at night, to teach us how to hunt, she laughed scornfully. It was hard enough to keep track of us in the daylight, she said, as Cobby tore past us hotly pursued by a colony of angry hornets, without attempting it in the darkness.

My pa in the meantime had stirred up a rabbit. We could hear him in the distance. And hurrying after him, I suddenly discovered that I was all alone.

Everything was quiet now. And as I looked up at those ferocious trees, with their giant-like arms and hidden eyes, I don't mind telling you that I was scared stiff.

And how I yipped! But it did no good. For there was no one within hearing distance except a crow, who simply jeered at me.

The thing to do, I decided, was to sit down and wait for my ma to find me. But she didn't show up. And after a long anxious wait I finally set out to try and find her.

Something peeked at me through the bushes. It had big green eyes. Like glazed teacups. But it needn't have worried. I didn't intend to harm it. To the contrary, I was only too thankful when it dropped back out of sight.

And Cobby had talked so bravely of hunting elephants! I had to admit then, as I ran frantically in one direction and then in another, that I hadn't the courage myself to hunt a mouse.

What I wanted was my ma. *Oh,* how I wanted her! From which you will see that puppies are a good bit like little boys. We aren't born brave. That is something we have to develop.

What would become of me, I then asked myself more steady-like, if my ma never found me? Would I have to spend the rest of my life in the forest, bagging my own game? And in time, as I probably encountered other wild dogs, would I forget that I ever had a ma and a pa?

No, no! I'd never forget my ma, I told my-

self, with tumbling emotion. Nor would I ever forget my swell pa, either. Even if I did have to become a wild dog temporarily, I'd hunt them up later on. And how surprised Mr. Bean would be when I came back to him wearing chin whiskers, with shoulders as big and broad as my pa's.

But I hoped with all my heart that there weren't any bears in the forest. In time I might become a fairly good rabbit hunter. I probably could pull a few clever tricks on the squirrels, too. But I didn't want to broaden my shoulders hunting bears and hippopotamuses. I guess not! For I could imagine, all right, what would happen to me, little squirt that I was, if a hippopotamus stepped on me.

I was good and hungry now. And remembering what my ma said about eating minnows, I started out in search of a creek. What I found instead was a spring, at the edge of which I noticed tracks in the mud. Smelling of these tracks, I couldn't decide whether they had been made by bears or tigers. But it was a good place to keep away from at night, I decided, having heard stories about African water holes where

the beasts gathered at night and playfully poked their horns through each other.

So, hastily lapping up a quart or two of water, I lit out down the hill, figuring that if I followed the stream from the spring I'd sooner or later come to a creek.

And how lovely, was my added thought, if I could only find the beginning of the creek that ran through Mr. Bean's farm. Easy enough then for me to find my way home!

But instead of leading me to a creek, as I had hoped, the stream from the spring finally ended in a marsh. And there I made a meal of crawfish, of which there were enough in the weedy marsh to feed all the wild dogs in the world. But while the crawfish satisfied me for the time being, I decided, with good taste, to find other food as soon as possible. Young rabbits, for instance, or baby woodchucks. And how great would be my pride later on when I was able to bring down full-grown woodchucks and even hyenas. The king of the forest! Such was the title that I gave myself. And I liked the sound of it, too.

Yes, I told myself, with stiffened courage, I'd

stay here, in pattern of my ancestors, and rule the roost. But how I'd miss Mrs. Bean's swell gravy! Um-yum-yum!

The forest, I noticed now, wasn't so full of sunlight. And thus warned of the coming darkness, I set about to locate a cave or other suitable sleeping place, having the good sense to realize that unless I properly protected myself from the probable prowling night creatures, the forest's champion hyena chaser was liable to come to a sudden and disastrous finish.

Crossing the marsh, I came to a rocky ledge. But there was no shelter for me there that I could see. So I kept on, uneasily conscious of the lengthening shadows. And finally, to my great joy, I caught sight of a cave.

It wasn't a big cave. But then, mere pup that I was, I didn't need a big cave. Besides a big cave was liable to invite bears and hyenas. And as I had to do some sleeping, in order to get those broad shoulders that I had been thinking about, I didn't care to wake up and find a hungry bear rubbing noses with me.

From which you will see that I was beginning to use my head.

Certainly, I told myself, as I made a bed of dry leaves in the extreme back part of the cave, I had learned a lot of things since morning. A house dog to start with, here I was a wild dog. In just one day I had learned how to feed myself in the forest and how to take care of myself.

Then, as the sun sank into the trees, and the lurking shadows got deeper and blacker outside of my cave, I went to sleep, curled up like a ball, hoping that the same Providence that kept mosquitoes' drillers sharp would watch over me and protect me.

A striped cat threw a gas bomb at us.

CHAPTER IV

PHEW!

A DOZEN hyenas may have looked in at me that night. But, if so, I knew nothing about it. For I slept the whole night through.

And now comes one of the happiest parts of my whole story. For what do you know if I didn't wake up at daybreak and find Cobby

parked contented-like on the loose end of my tail!

"For the love of mud," I stared, unwilling at first to believe my own eyes, "where did *you* come from?"

"Oh," says he, yawning, "I blew in last night in the moonlight."

"But how did you know I was here?" says I, regarding him curiously.

"I didn't," says he, "till I fell over you in the dark."

And I had told myself, in dropping off, that I would awaken at the first sound of danger! A wild dog should. Still, I sort of excused myself, I hadn't been a wild dog very long. And probably I would improve with time.

Cobby then told me that he, too, was a wild dog. We were both lost, it seems. And the wonder was to us, as we compared notes, that we hadn't crossed each other's trails before this, for he knew all about the spring and the crawfish marsh.

But how strange that the both of us should have been attracted to the same cave! Truly there *was* a kind Providence in this world. And

this same Providence had been a lot closer to me, when I dropped asleep, than I had suspected. After this demonstration I was ready to believe that other good things were likely to happen to us. And so I began the day in a very happy and hopeful frame of mind.

"How about some nice juicy gorilla steak?" says I, when it came time to eat.

"Meaning which?" says Cobby, eying me sharply. For *he* knew, all right, that I was trying to razz him.

"Don't tell me," says I, pretending surprise, "that you ran out of spit."

"Go lay an egg," says he.

I rolled my eyes sort of tragic-like.

"Alas!" says I. "I can see where we resort to the old bill-of-fare. But for a change," I added brightly, "we might eat the crawfish this morning claws and all."

So we set out for the marsh. And having had our fill we next visited the spring, where we found added tracks in the mud.

"What do you bet," says I, giving Cobby another dig, "that they aren't gorilla tracks."

"Oh, shut up," says he, kind of sour-like.

He knew now that there weren't any gorillas in the forest. In fact the biggest thing we saw that morning was a sick-looking rabbit. And slowly it percolated into our beans that we weren't in such a wild place after all.

Then who should heave into sight, near the big spring, but a whole mess of people in a hay-rack. It was a picnic party. And when the merrymakers unloaded their grub Cobby and I got busy.

"It wouldn't be right," says he, the old merry twinkle having returned to his eyes, "for us to deliberately snitch a cake. Absolutely not. But suppose we saw a boa constrictor over there by the grub pile. That is, a boa constrictor that *looked* like a chocolate cake or a chocolate cake that *looked* like a boa constrictor. Wouldn't it be our duty, after killing the snake, or possibly the cake, to drag it away and eat it?"

I didn't get any sense out of that.

"Make it plainer," says I.

"All right," he laughed. "You watch me and I'll show you how to do it."

In piling their grub beside the spring the picnickers, of course, never suspected that it was

liable to be molested by two hungry wild dogs. So it was easy for Cobby to creep up on the grub, the young folks in the party having scattered through the forest in search of adventure. A couple of old women sat near the empty hay-rack, talking about home-made quilts and strawberry preserves. But they were too deeply engrossed in their own domestic gab to pay any attention to the life-and-death struggle that ensued between Cobby and a mammoth chocolate cake, which, of course, was the "boa constrictor" that he had mentioned.

That "boa constrictor" talk of his was just a lot of bunk.

The cake tried to sink its floury fangs into him. More than that, it tried to entrap him in its sticky coils. But Cobby knew his stuff, having waged a similar battle with one of Mrs. Bean's chocolate cakes. So in the end he galloped victoriously from the scene, after which I advanced and took a whack at the old cake myself, charging it furiously here and there. And, of course, every time I charged it I got a big mouthful!

One cake, though, didn't satisfy Cobby.

"Look!" says he, putting on a lot of excitement. "There's another boa constrictor over there."

"Where?" says I quickly.

"Don't you see it?" his excitement deepened. "There! It just stuck its head out of the sandwich box."

Then he squared his shoulders.

"Duty calls," says he, sort of heroic-like.

"Listen, bozo," says I, stopping him. "Suppose you let duty call *me* once in a while. For it so happens that you aren't the only lost poodle in this forest with an appetite."

"*You* fight a sandwich boa constrictor!" he stared at me, sort of incredulous-like.

"And why not?" says I easily.

"No, no, Tuffy," he shook his head. "It's too dangerous. I can't let you take the risks."

"Am I supposed to weep with gratitude?" says I.

"You're supposed to wait here till I kill the snake," says he, "after which we'll eat the sandwiches together."

"Yah," says I pointedly, "you'll eat two-thirds of them and generously offer me the balance."

"But I *should* get the biggest share," says he, "for I take all the risks."

The big gyp! But I wished afterwards that I had let him have his own way. For what do you know if one of the old women didn't surprise me when I was wrestling the sandwiches around and sock me with a club. Boy, she almost knocked me cuckoo. Talk about *stars!* I saw the whole universe with a couple of extra comets thrown in for good measure.

Nor did I get any sympathy from Cobby when I dragged myself into the forest to nurse my bruised head.

"We might have had the whole works," he growled, watching the two women as they angrily gathered up the balance of their grub and parked it in the hayrack, "if you hadn't butted in."

"But why didn't you warn me?" I groaned, as the bump on my head got bigger and bigger.

"*Warn* you?" he fired back at me. "Did I ask you to warn *me?* A good boa constrictor fighter," he stuck out his chest, "doesn't have to be warned. He knows how to do it. It's technique. And I've got it in big gobs."

Him and his technique!

"Aw, shut up," I growled. "You give me a pain."

Then he laughed.

"Never mind, Tuffy," he loved me with his dancing eyes. "You're all right. And what you don't know I'll teach you."

There was a chorus of angry voices when the young picnickers found out about their ruined cake. And afraid that they would spot us, and exercise a pair of clubs on us in pattern of the old woman, we beat it for the cave intending to hide there until evening.

But what do you know if a measly little striped cat hadn't parked herself in our bed! The nerve of some creatures! Descending on the intruder, like a twin hurricane, we clawed our way to the outer air again, sort of gasping for breath, when she threw a gas bomb at us.

Stink! Oh, mister man! The wonder is that we weren't completely gassed to death.

"It wasn't a cat," wailed Cobby, as he sort of spread himself for ventilation. "It was a skunk."

Yah, it was a *skunk,* all right. No doubt

about it. I had sort of figured that out myself.

It takes more than a skunk, though, to down Cobby's good spirits. And soon he was laughing just as gay as ever.

"Shucks!" says he. "What if we do smell kind of strong? It will wear off in time. Meanwhile we have the whole forest to ourselves."

"You seem to forget," says I, "that there's a picnic going on over by the spring."

His thought thus turned to the picnickers he regarded me curiously.

"I wonder who they are?" says he, sort of reflective-like.

"Search me," says I.

Then, favored by his quick wits, he gave an excited cry.

"Tuffy! *I* know how we can get out of the forest! We'll follow them when they go home."

"Yah," says I, "and wind up on the outskirts of China. Besides," I gave him another dig, "I thought that you wanted to stick around here and bag a few elephants."

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" he sang merrily. "You can't make me sore. As for these picnickers,"

he added thoughtfully, "I have a hunch that they're neighbors of ours. For we aren't so far from home. Had you thought of that?"

"How can I think," says I miserably, "when I smell like this?"

"Well," he laughed, "I'll do the thinking for you. . . . Come on."

Pretty soon we saw a boy and a girl sitting on a log. They were old enough to be in love with each other. And to judge from their soft actions they were now comparing notes to find out which one was suffering the worst.

"Let's sneak up on them and listen," says Cobby.

Which we did.

"Why, Mildred," says young Lochinvar, "you *know* I love you. I'll always love you. I'd wade through rivers of fire for you. I'd climb icy mountains."

"Sweetheart!" says Mildred, giving him a sort of dying-calf look. And then she gagged.

Lochinvar gagged, too.

"It's us," chuckled Cobby. "They just got a whiff of us."

The lovers, though, hated to desert the ship.

For this was a wonderful moment to them.

"I've often thought," says Mildred, dishing out another smothering glance, "that Heaven is a haven of lovers."

And then did she ever exercise her esophagus as she caught sight of me in the weeds!

"Look!" she screamed, having correctly interpreted the billowy odor that was bouncing around among the stumps. "There comes a skunk!"

A skunk! Of all the crummy insults! Still, with that delightful odor buzzing around her nose, it isn't to be wondered at that she got her zoology tangled up.

Anyway, it was fun to see them scoot through the forest holding their noses.

"And he's the bird," laughed Cobby, "who was going to climb icy mountains and wade through rivers of fire."

"It's a cinch," I laughed, "that he'd never get to the mountain top if he met a skunk on the way."

And now let me tell you about the forty robbers and the later treasure cave that we discovered. Gee!

Ali Baba left the robbers' cave laden with treasure.

CHAPTER V

THE FORTY ROBBERS

I HAD noticed some boys in the picnic party. They wore tight-legged brown suits and broad-brimmed felt hats. Cobby, who picks up more stuff than I could tell you about in a month of Sundays, said they were Boy Scouts. And such they proved to be, as we learned when we later

followed them into the forest, where we overheard their elderly leader, whom they called the Scoutmaster, drilling them on the different kinds of trees, telling them in conclusion that good Scouts never nicked the bark off living trees with hatchets.

The Scoutmaster's name, we learned, was Mr. Leander Lillesand. And all het up, after their instructive and peppy trip through the forest, the boys now gathered around their trusted leader, who showed plainly enough by his kindly actions how much he cared for them, begging him to tell them a story.

Which explains how Cobby and I got wise to old Ali Baba and his treasure cave. For that was the story that Mr. Lillesand told to his young charges, my brother and I having parked ourselves comfortably behind a near-by stump.

Nor did the eager listeners suspect that the supposed skunk that had followed them through the forest was in reality a pair of perfumed wild dogs. Which, Cobby and I thought, was a corking good joke on them.

"Ali Baba," began Mr. Lillesand, the Scouts having gathered around him in a circle, "was a

poor woodcutter. Nor did he get any help from his brother Cassim, who, having married a rich widow, was the owner of a profitable business. All Ali Baba owned was the three donkeys on which he hauled to town the wood that he cut in an outlying forest. Firewood in those days didn't bring much of a price, so Ali Baba and his wife lived from hand to mouth."

"I wish I could do that," spoke up one of the Scouts, called Rubber Gullet, but whose real name, we learned, was Bob Billings.

"Do what?" grunted another Scout, named Al Kenseth.

"Live from hand to mouth," says Rubber Gullet. "The trouble is," he hungrily showed a pair of empty hands, "I haven't anything to live on."

"If I had a mouth like yours," put in Joe Simonsen, still another Scout, "I wouldn't talk about it any more than I had to. For every time I look at it I think of Mammoth Cave."

"Oh, yah!" bridled Rubber Gullet.

"Why don't you start at your ears and sew up three or four inches of it?" was Joe's amiable suggestion.

"Oh, shut up," roared a little squirt by the name of Bud Cowie, "and listen to the story."

"One day," Mr. Lillesand resumed, "when Ali Baba was in the forest he saw at a distance a great cloud of dust which seemed to approach him. Soon a body of horsemen came into sight. And suspecting that they were robbers, the frightened woodcutter, after hiding his donkeys, climbed a large tree, planted on a high rock, where he concealed himself in the topmost branches.

"The horsemen, forty in number, all armed and hard-looking, came to the foot of the rock on which the tree stood and there dismounted. Ali Baba watched them from his high perch in fear and trembling. For he saw now that they were indeed robbers, just as he had suspected. Each had a saddlebag, which, from its weight, seemed to be full of gold and silver. The captain of the band came under the tree, and making his way through some shrubbery pronounced the words: 'Open, Sesame!'"

"What's that?" Rubber Gullet inquired quickly. "Something good to eat?"

"As I understand it," smiled Mr. Lillesand, as

four or five of the active Scouts piled on the hungry questioner, threatening, if he didn't shut up, to throw him into the spring, " 'Sesame' is some kind of a small grain, like wheat. Anyway, the captain said: 'Open, Sesame!' And instantly a door opened in the rock. The horses having been left outside to graze, the captain and his men then entered the rock, the mysterious door closing behind them. And there sat Ali Baba in the top of the tree, staring his eyes out, and wondering what it was all about! Still, he didn't wonder so very much either. For common sense told him that the cave was full of treasure, put there at different times by the robbers, who plainly made the place their headquarters.

"After a bit the door opened again, and the captain, having been the last one in, now appeared first, counting his men as they filed past him. And when all were outside he closed the door by saying: 'Shut, Sesame!' After which the men got on their horses and rode away, never suspecting that their treasure was to fall into the hands of a hitherto poor woodcutter.

"But that's what happened, Ali Baba having

found that he could open and close the magic door as well as the robber captain himself. Within the cave, which to his surprise was a well-lighted and spacious chamber, he found provisions of all sorts—rich bales of silk, valuable carpets piled one on top of another, and, most exciting of all to the trespasser, urn after urn of gold and silver nuggets, also bags of gold coins, which Ali Baba quickly transferred to his donkeys, taking care to cover the treasure with light branches. After which he shut the door behind him, in pattern of the robber captain, and started for home.

"Mrs. Ali Baba, of course, was terribly excited when she saw her husband's new wealth and heard his amazing story. It was the woodcutter's sensible plan to bury the gold in his back yard, digging it up as he needed it. But Mrs. Ali Baba wanted first to measure it, and so borrowed a small measure from her sister-in-law, who lived close by.

"Curious to learn what her husband's supposedly poor relatives were going to measure, for they rarely had a spoonful of anything ahead, and getting no direct reply from Mrs.

Ali Baba herself, Cassim's wife cleverly put some glue in the bottom of the measure. And later, finding traces of gold in the returned receptacle, she hurriedly sought her husband, who, never having used his brother well, now was nettled by the woodcutter's changed fortunes. When cornered, Ali Baba confessed all, offering his already rich brother part of the treasure. But when Cassim went to get it, taking ten donkeys with him, the cave proved a trap. He got in all right. But so excited was he by what he saw there, greedy man that he was, he forgot the magic words, as given to him by his brother, and couldn't get out. He could think of corn and barley. But he couldn't think of 'Sesame.' Which was his poor luck. And later surprised by the returned robbers, he was killed.

"Nor did the robbers suspect at the time that still another man knew the cave's secret, until Cassim's body, as left in the cave by its owners, came up missing, Ali Baba having taken it away to properly bury it. After various attempts to identify the unknown trespasser, the robbers learned that Ali Baba, once a poor woodcutter but now rich and influential, was the one who

knew the cave's secret. And they cooked up a plot to get him out of the way, to thus protect the remainder of their treasure. Disguised as an oil merchant, the robber captain brought his band to Ali Baba's door, the armed men having been concealed in huge jugs carried in pairs by a string of donkeys. Ali Baba, glad to extend the hospitality of his home to the supposed oil merchant, who let on that he couldn't get rooms at the inn, was told that the thirty-odd jugs contained rare oil. But a clever servant learned the truth about the jugs. And the robber band having been put out of the way by the capable servant, who poured hot oil into the jugs, Ali Baba was later advised of his narrow escape. In time he got rid of the captain, too, who had planned that night to let his followers into the house, to thus bring about its owner's destruction.

"Ali Baba now had the treasure cave all to himself. And when he grew old, and couldn't visit the cave, to replenish his wealth, he confided the secret to his eldest son, who thereafter lifted the treasure as required."

The story ending here, a shout arose from the Scouts.

"Let's eat," cried Rubber Gullet, breaking into a run, the others quickly taking after him.

And thus reminded that it was supper time, with no chance of added boa constrictor cakes or sandwiches coming our way, Cobby and I dismally sought the crawfish marsh.

On the way back to the spring we found a tin box dropped by one of the Scouts. And when we clawed the box open out fell a bottle containing some kind of a liquid and a roll of bandages.

"It's a first-aid kit," says Cobby. And then did he ever gag when he got a whiff of the bottle's contents! Boy, as he said, with sparkling eyes, we'd fix that old skunk now! Nor did we care very much when we learned that the picnickers had gotten away from us, having decided, I guess, that unless they got out of the forest while the getting was good they were liable to be attacked by another shower of skunk fumes. For we still had the wheel tracks to guide us into the outside world.

"What is it?" says I, as Cobby took another whiff of the bottle's contents.

"Sloane's liniment," says he, squinting at the label.

"But what's it for?" I pressed.

"Bruises," says he shortly.

"Then pass it over," says I quickly.

He helped me put some of the liniment on my banged-up head. And then did I ever dance! For the stuff burned like sixty. It made the tears come, too. And you should have heard us sneeze!

Yes, sir, as Cobby had said, we sure had something now that would make that old skunk back up and shut up. We'd beat her at her own game, so to speak. And the result would be just too bad for her, and nothing else but.

Then, eager to start the fun, we lit out for the cave lickety-cut, chuckling to ourselves as we swished through the bowlders and bulrushes.

We heard her gagging and sneezing.

CHAPTER VI

BATTLING ODORS

"Do you believe it, Cobby?" says I, when we stopped for a moment or two beside a hole in the ground where some kind of a small cock-eyed creature had popped out of sight at our approach.

"What?" says he, putting his nose into the hole and sniffing.

"That old Ali Baba really snitched the robbers' gold on them."

"And why not?" came the prompt counter question. "For it happened many years ago. And everybody knows that robbers then lived in caves."

I didn't know it. And I got kind of sore at him for acting so all-fired smart. Huh! He liked to let on that he knew everything. Then, as I did a little skull practice (thinking) of my own, I got excited.

"How about our own cave?" says I eagerly. "Do you suppose robbers used to hang out there years ago?"

"Be yourself, Tuffy," he kind of turned up his nose at me, acting more superior-like than ever. "A man couldn't get into *that* cave. It's too small."

"Maybe it shrunk," says I, trying to let myself down as easy as possible. For even a dog hates to admit that he's a dumb-bell.

And then did I ever feel like fainting when Cobby agreed with me!

"I bet you're right, Tuffy," says he excitedly. "It was a big cave when the robbers lived here. Sure thing! Then they got in bad with a magician and he put them out of business."

"What kind of a musician?" says I, thinking of Mrs. Popover and her organ concert.

"Oh, Tuffy," I was given a disgusted look, "don't be dumb! I didn't say *musician.* For how could a musician put a robber band out of business?"

"Mrs. Popover could," I laughed, "if she sang to them."

"It was a *magician,* Tuffy, not a *mu*sician. He got sore at them. See? And when he shrunk up the cave on them he probably crushed them all out of shape. Down came the ceiling. Up came the floor. And then they were pancakes."

"Cobby," says I, staring at him sort of horrified-like, as a picture of the suffering robbers jumped around in my mind, "do you know that to be a fact?"

For if it *was* a fact, I told myself hastily, I sure would kiss that cave a speedy good-by. For what assurance had we that the old musician, or

whatever his handle was, wouldn't come back and close up the cave altogether?

But Cobby laughed at me, telling me that I had too much imagination. And pretty soon he had me laughing, too.

"Just the same," says he, jerking his head sort of thoughtful-like, "it took real magic to work the door in that other cave."

He meant the treasure cave.

"Then you really think," says I, going back to my original question, "that the story is true?"

"Granting that there were magicians in those days," says he, "it could be true."

"Ali Baba was lucky," says I, sort of dreamy-like.

"*And* how," says Cobby.

"Still," says I, reading his thoughts, which matched my own, "what good would it do us if we did find such a cave? For dogs like you and I can't eat bales of silk and valuable carpets. As for gold nuggets, we'd soon choke to death if we tried to guzzle stuff like that."

"You seem to completely overlook the fact, Tuffy," says he quietly, "that Mr. Bean could use the gold. And I have a hunch that he needs

it, too. For do you know why old Squire Popover hangs around our house so much? Well, I'll tell you. He's got a mortgage on the farm. I heard about it. For I've got ears. And one day I heard Mrs. Bean crying, too. She was scared to death, she told Mr. Bean, who stood there with a face as long as a cow's tail, that some day the farm would be taken away from them."

Talk like that made me dizzy.

"But if it's their farm," says I, "how can old Popover take it away from them?"

"Didn't I just tell you that he has a mortgage on it?"

"What's that?" I further spread my ignorance around.

Cobby sighed.

"Tuffy," says he, "I hope you'll start in at a kindergarten some day and learn something."

A kindergarten! Gosh! I didn't even know what *that* was. But I very wisely kept my trap shut.

I then got posted on the mortgage business.

"Last fall," says Cobby, "when Mrs. Bean had to go to the hospital, Mr. Bean borrowed

five hundred dollars from Squire Popover. My ma told me all about it. And the paper that Mr. Bean signed at the time was a mortgage. It says in this paper that the farm will become old Popover's at the end of a year if the debt isn't paid."

I thought of how Mrs. Bean and Mrs. Popover had hugged each other at the kitchen door.

"But they're old family friends," says I, referring to the husbands as well as the wives. "They've known each other for years. And surely a man as rich as Popover is wouldn't take an old friend's farm away from him."

"It's a business deal," says Cobby, "and everybody who knows old Popover admits that he lets nothing interfere with business. He likes money. And once he fastens his hands on a dollar it never gets away from him."

"I'd like to chaw a hole in the seat of his pants," says I, with sudden anger.

"Mr. Bean is a fine man," Cobby gave a thoughtful nod. "And Mrs. Bean is a fine woman. They're kind to their animals, as we know, and enjoy helping their neighbors. But they're no money-makers. And with the five-

hundred-dollar debt hanging over them they're hoping, of course, if they haven't the money to clear up the debt when it comes due, that old Popover will give them more time. And maybe he will. But there's nothing certain about it, as Mrs. Bean told her husband the day I caught her crying. She often has blue spells, she said."

Mr. and Mrs. Bean meant a lot to me.

"But what would become of them," says I, kind of worried-like, "if they did lose their farm?"

"That's it exactly," nodded Cobby, with anxious eyes. "What *would* become of them?"

"And what would become of us?" I further inquired, with rising anxiety.

"We've proved," says Cobby, in that steady, courageous way of his, "that we can take care of ourselves. That's no problem. But Mr. and Mrs. Bean are in a fix. They might even have to go to the poorhouse." There was a slight pause. "Boy," Cobby's eyes snapped now, "I wish we *could* find a treasure cave."

I looked around. But I could see no approaching horsemen or dust clouds. Besides, I was sensibly reminded, how could a pair of wild

dogs climb a tree? Plainly, I concluded, saddened by the story that I had heard of our master's debt and our inability to help him, we'd never get rich the way Ali Baba did.

And all the time, of course, we were getting closer to the cave where the skunk was.

"How are we going to work it?" says I, when Cobby took another whiff of the liniment to make sure that it wasn't losing its strength.

"If she's still there," says he, "we'll block up the mouth of the cave and pour the liniment through a crack."

"But what if she gags herself to death?" says I, kind of anxious-like.

"As though we'd weep over that!" he turned up his nose.

"I'd rather fumigate her," says I, "than kill her, Cobby."

"Don't worry," he spoke confidently. "We'll fumigate her, all right."

Even though we were messed up ourselves by the nasty smell our noses told us that the fragrant intruder was still in the cave long before we got within sight of it. And I wondered, as we waded through the stink clouds that rolled up and down

the hillsides, if we'd ever get the smell out of our new home.

It was fast getting dark, which favored our plans. And coming to the cave we quickly rolled a rock in front of it. Then we got another rock, and still another, later stuffing sod into the cracks.

"Who's out there?" a familiar sharp voice spoke from the back of the cave.

"Santa Claus," says Cobby, rolling another rock into place.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" came the quick retort. "I thought," a sharper note was injected into the voice, "that I told you to get out of here and stay out?"

Boy, was she ever the crabby little thing!

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" says Cobby, patting the barricade here and there.

"You won't be so happy," the voice snapped, "if I come out there and cuff your ears."

"No?" says Cobby pleasantly.

Then winking at me, he got out the liniment bottle.

"It so happens, sister," he added, "that this is our cave. We found it first. And as we have

need of it, we've decided to put you out of it."

"Brute!" the word was snapped at us.

"Moreover, we don't like the way you mussed us up this afternoon with that rotten smell of yours. So we've decided to give you a dose of your own medicine. Here's looking at you, stink-face. And let's hope you like it in there."

The liniment having been poured through a crack, we sat down to enjoy the fun, noticing now that there was a moon in the sky.

Skunks have a big opinion of themselves. They think they're the world's champion stinkers. And how they love to mess up other innocent creatures with their nasty smell. But here was one skunk, let me tell you, who had met her match. And did we ever laugh as we heard her gagging and sneezing behind the barricade. Pretty soon she began to beg. Wouldn't we *please* let her out, she whined, promising never to bother us again. But, as Cobby said, why spoil a good thing? So we sat there in comfort as the battle continued, the conflicting smells socking each other to beat the cars, first one getting in a husky whack and then the other. But the liniment won. And having clawed her way

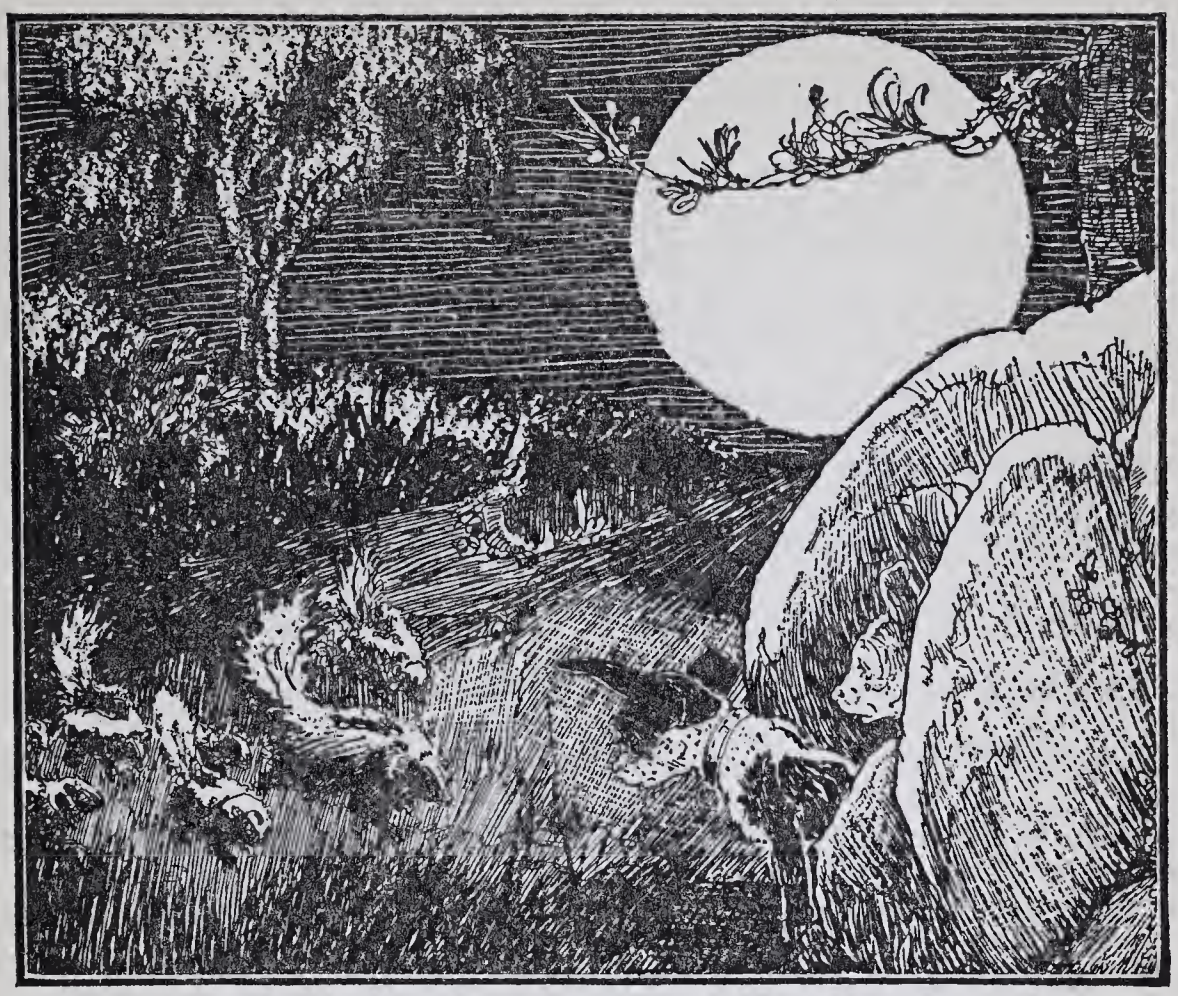
through the rock pile the ousted skunk shot by us like a flash, soon disappearing into the forest.

And that was that!

Rolling the rocks away, we later took everything out of the cave, for the nasty smells that had battled there seemed particularly to cling to the leaves on which Cobby and I had slept so soundly the preceding night. Getting more leaves we finally settled in comfort, chuckling to ourselves over the clever trick that we had played on the skunk.

Yes, we thought we were pretty smart. We admitted it. And now let me tell you what *she* did.

Skunks are skunks, all right. They're skunks by smell and skunks by deeds. And that catty old thing was the skunkiest skunk of them all.



No wonder I had dreamt of a garbage truck.

CHAPTER VII

BELLA'S VENGEANCE

DOGS dream the same as people. Take my pa for instance. He's forever chasing rabbits in his sleep. And you should hear him snort! He kicks, too, like a house afire. And how sheepish he looks afterwards when my ma awakens him. But it's fun, he says.

So it would't have been a bit surprising if Cobby and I, that night, had lived over again in our dreams the story that we had heard that afternoon in the forest. In fact I rather looked forward to the experience, wondering to myself if I would be Ali Baba in the probable dream or one of the horses. I wanted, of course, to be the hero himself. And would I ever give my wife a razzing if she said anything about borrowing a measure from that snoopy sister-in-law of mine! For I could see no sense in sharing my new wealth with Cassim even in a dream.

But instead of pleasing treasure caves, I dreamt of a garbage truck. And what a stinking old truck it was! Phew! I tried to escape it. But wherever I turned it cornered me, seemingly determined to put me out of business.

Choking and gasping I finally awakened. And there sat Cobby looking at me in the moonlight. Tears were streaming out of his eyes. And he had stuffed dirt into his nostrils.

"We're done for, Tuffy," he gasped.

"Done for?" I repeated, staring at him, too sleepy at first to notice what was going on around me. "What do you mean?"

"Look outside," says he.

Which I did. And there sat that old skunk in the moonlight.

"Yes, Grandpa," she was speaking to another skunk with long white whiskers, "you stay over there in the wind. And make yourself smell as bad as possible. The little brats!" she added spitefully, glancing toward the cave. "I'll teach them to fumigate me with liniment."

So the whole skunk family had turned out, huh? I could see striped figures sitting all over the hillside. No wonder I had dreamt of a garbage truck! Then still another old skunk limped into sight, leaning shakily on a cane.

"I got here jest as quick as I could, Bella," he spoke to our recent victim, who ran to meet him, showing plainly enough by her actions how glad she was to see him.

And I soon found out why she made such a fuss over him. For he was one of the champion stinkers of the family. And what do you know if she didn't park him at the very mouth of the cave and fan the smell inside!

Suffering cats! The air was gooey now. Like molasses. For what Grandpa and his tribe

didn't know about stink making wasn't worth learning.

"How are you feeling, Uncle Charley?" Bella then inquired of the old stink-foot with the cane.

"Oh, purty good fur an ol' man," came the cackling reply. "Kind of losin' my pep, though," he waggled. "Can't begin to stir up the stink that I could in my younger days. Why," he warmed up to the subject, his voice quavering with excitement, "I've known the time, Bella, when I could even turn my own stomach. And thar's your Uncle Billy. When *we* worked together, gal, they was *some* stink, and I don't mean maybe."

This gave Bella an idea.

"Quick," she told one of the younger skunks, who was hanging around, I guess, to get a few lessons. "Run to the spring and get Uncle Billy."

Cobby staggered across the cave and collapsed at my feet.

"Oh, oh, oh!" he moaned, sort of stretching it out like a squawking calf. "This is *awful.*"

"Let's hope," I gasped, as the two chief stinkers changed places, hoping for beneficial

results, "that Uncle Billy has paralysis."

"I'm done for, Tuffy," came the added moan.

"Let's make a run for it," I suggested.

"I haven't the necessary strength. Besides, we'd never get through that line alive."

"But we've got to do *something,"* I cried, sort of desperate-like. "For we can't stay here and face Uncle Billy if he's any worse than the others."

"And I used to think," murmured Cobby, "that rotten eggs had a bad smell!"

"Stick your nose in the ground," says I. "That helps some."

"Tuffy," came faintly.

"Yes?" says I.

"If you survive, remember how well I like prunes. And try to find a comfortable resting place for me under somebody's spreading prune tree."

"Don't give up, Cobby," I begged. "Please. For I couldn't tell a prune tree from a macaroni bush."

Then a triumphant shout arose from the assembled stinkers when Uncle Billy bustled briskly into sight.

"Kiss me good-by," Cobby made his voice sound weaker than ever. "For I'm sinking fast."

"Yah," says I, taking a whiff of the immediate scenery, "and Uncle Billy is *stinking* fast. Boy, he's some artist."

"Are you there, Tuffy," came the weak inquiry.

"Oh, shut up," my patience gave out. "You know blamed well that you aren't dying. I guess you can stand it if I can."

Which brought a laugh. For Cobby is that way, bully little pal that he is. And then, in spite of our predicament, I laughed, too. Still, it was a kind of crazy laugh. And squinting into the cave, Bella, I guess, thought that we were having death-bed hysterics.

"You're doing fine, Uncle Billy," she praised.

"And how 'bout me?" piped up old Uncle Charley.

"You're both doing fine," came the added praise.

"Wa-al, as I tol' you, me and Billy always did work well together. But havin' taken on the weight of years we hain't the stinkers that we used to be."

"Let's call a truce?" says Cobby.

"What's that?" says I.

"Wave your tail at them," says he. "It's got a white tip. And tell them we're going home tomorrow. Maybe they'll ease up on us then."

But Bella, I learned, when I carried out Cobby's suggestion, wasn't the "easing-up" kind.

"Don't you budge, Uncle Billy," she briskly instructed her talented relative. "Nor you either, Uncle Charley. Give 'em all you've got," she added spitefully. "And make it hot."

Boy, it was hot, all right. And were we ever thankful when a sudden shower came up, driving the stinkers to cover. Gradually the fumes blew away. But there was no more sleep for us that night. And when daybreak came we refreshed ourselves in the crawfish marsh and started for home, guided by the wheel tracks of the loaded hayrack.

We found ourselves in a new country now. It was rockier and hillier. And losing the trail in a gravelly creek bed, we wandered about for hours before we finally recovered the trail near the edge of the forest. Here we stopped to rest, sort of spreading out on the soft earth. And

then, just as in the treasure-cave story, we caught sight of a cloud of dust. It kept getting closer. We could hear the thumping feet of horses, too. And certain now that a band of robbers was descending on us, in exactly the same manner that a similar band had descended on Ali Baba, we hid in the bushes, our hearts thumping and our eyes sticking out like peeled onions.

"Whoo-o-o!" says the captain of the band, stopping his horse beside us. And taking a guarded peek we counted ten other horsemen. Just as in the story the captain went over to a rock and said: "Open, Sesame!" Then, the rock having opened, they all dismounted and went inside, taking their saddlebags with them, the door closing behind them.

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked," says Cobby, staring at me. "I never expected to see anything like that."

"What are they?" says I. "Dwarfs?"

"They certainly aren't full-grown men. And those horses over there are just ponies. But it's a band of robbers, all right. There's no doubt about that. And will we ever mess up that gold pile of theirs when they dig out! Oh, baby!

Mr. and Mrs. Bean won't have to go to the poorhouse now. Hug me, Tuffy. Hug me tight. I'm so happy I could kiss a pig."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," says I pointedly.

"Meaning which?" says he.

"Dogs," says I, "aren't equipped to rob treasure caves. It takes men to do that."

"We'll find a way to do it, Tuffy. We've *got* to do it," he added grimly. "For think what it means to Mr. and Mrs. Bean!"

"But suppose we got trapped in the cave," says I, "like Cassim?"

"We can't both forget the magic word," he argued sensibly.

"It would be just too bad for us," says I, shivering, "if we did."

For these robbers, let me tell you, were hard. They showed it in their looks and dress, some of them wearing long black whiskers and others dangling earrings. Regular pirate stuff. We had noticed guns, too, and swords. As Cobby had said, we probably wouldn't forget the magic word. But the mere fact that we knew how to get out of the cave wouldn't save us if the rob-

bers came back unexpectedly and found us messing their stuff around.

Like Cassim we probably would find ourselves pinned to the wall with a sword. Br-r-r-r. The bare thought of it gave me cold shivers. As I told Cobby, I wanted to rob the cave and thus save Mr. and Mrs. Bean. But I certainly wasn't going to take any needless chances.

Then, to our added surprise, a man came into sight in the forest path carrying a small black box. He wasn't dressed like the others. But evidently he was one of the band, for the door having been opened for him he passed inside.

The robbers were laughing now. We could hear them. And pretty soon, having emptied their saddlebags, they came out of the cave, closing the door behind them.

Cobby could hardly wait till the band had disappeared down the forest path, so eager was he to lift the treasure in the cave. And watching him, I marveled at his courage.

As for myself, if you must know the truth of the matter I was scared stiff, the more so when we stood in front of the hidden door and pronounced the magic word.

All we had to do was pull the rope.

CHAPTER VIII

BURIED TREASURE

I WAS half inclined to believe, on further reflection, that we had seen a bunch of ghosts or something. Which accounted for the shivers that were jiggling around so merrily in the vicinity of my backbone. For it didn't seem possible to me that the same thing could happen

twice. Yet there in front of us was the cave door, opening into a rocky ledge. Nothing very ghostly about that! And there on the ground were the prints of the horses' feet. Besides, *these* robbers were fewer in number and smaller. It wasn't the same band, brought back to earth after all these years for our possible entertainment. It was a different band. A *real* band.

Yet how queer, was my added anxious thought, that they should have used the same magical word! Not that there was any secret about the word. For the treasure-cave story was known to hundreds of thousands of boys and girls. And I could readily imagine how many times the magical word had been used in fun. But the undersized robber captain had actually made the thing work. That was the amazing part.

The more I thought about it the dizzier I got. It seemed so *utterly* improbable, or whatever you call it. But it *had* happened. We had seen it happen. And now, if Cobby's plans weren't kicked in the seat of the pants, added things paralleling Ali Baba's recorded adventures were liable to happen.

Cobby was full of business now.

"Well," says he, standing in front of the cave door, "are you ready?"

And gritting my teeth I told him to go ahead and open it, hoping, if a spook jumped at me, that I'd be able to spit in its eyes and drown it, in much the same manner that he had intended to stock up the family larder with gorilla meat.

But the door never budged!

"You talk to it," says he, peculiarly disappointed.

So I stepped out in front and said the magic word. But the door didn't like my gab either.

"That's queer," says Cobby. And then he went over to the door and examined it, finding that it had a rope fastened to it.

While he was following the rope, which extended into a thicket, I took a closer squint at the door, noticing that it was hung on hinges. It even had a cracked white knob! And still it was supposed to be a secret door!

"Cobby!" I yelled, convinced now that the whole thing was some kind of a joke. For what protection would a noticeable door like this give to a gob of stolen gold? The robbers might just

as well have hung a telltale sign in front of the cave, further drawing attention to it.

"What do you want?" says Cobby, appearing suddenly beside me.

I pointed to the door.

"If that's a secret door," says I, turning up my nose, "I'm a bedbug's great aunt."

"Let's sit down," says Cobby, with a queer look on his face.

"What's the matter?" says I quickly.

"I want to figure this thing out if I can. For I made a strange discovery over there in the thicket. As you say, there's nothing secret about this door. Any one passing this way would be sure to notice it. And evidently it was opened by one of the robbers who went into the thicket, unnoticed by us, and pulled the rope. For I followed the rope until I came to the end of it. And there in the soft earth was the robber's footprints. But why did the captain let on that he was a magician? That's what stumps me. *You* heard him say the word, Tuffy. And as soon as he pronounced it, open went the door. It looked like magic to us. But it was just a trick. *I* can open the door, too, if you say so. For all I've

got to do is pull on the rope and it will open."

"All right," says I daringly, "give it a yank. And let's hope that the treasure isn't as big a fake as the door itself."

I was in hopes, of course, that the cave's contents would be a happy surprise to us, for I wanted to save Mr. and Mrs. Bean from going to the poorhouse. But common sense told me not to build my hopes too high. Experienced robbers, I was reminded, wouldn't hide real treasure behind a fake secret door. The whole thing, so to speak, was a sort of sham.

The door having opened, Cobby and I advanced cautiously into what appeared to be a cave of considerable depth. It looked completely empty to me. But my companion made better use of his eyes. And having spotted four big milk crocks at the back of the cave he let out a crazy yip.

"Tuffy!" he cried, his voice ringing peculiarly through the empty cavern. "Come quick! There's a fortune here. The crocks are full of gold nuggets."

I got there just as quickly as I could. And having seen the nuggets with my own eyes, I

can't begin to describe the feeling that crept over me. It was a sort of reverent feeling, I guess. Usually dogs don't think about such things. But I did. And there were tears of joy in my eyes. Our dear master wouldn't have to go to the poorhouse now. For here was enough gold to pay off all the mortgages in the world. At least, so it seemed to me at the moment. And the gold was all his, too. Every bit of it. Some Power that I couldn't see or understand was helping him through us.

Cobby ran outside to make sure that the robbers were nowhere near. And then, taking the nuggets one by one, we carried them mouth-fashion to the foot of the hill, where, having dug a big hole, we buried them, properly marking the place so that we could find it as required. Then, having closed the cave door, behind which stood the four empty crocks, we beat it down the path to the edge of the forest, there taking to a country road.

Bells rang in the distance, reminding us that it was Sunday. And pretty soon we came within sight of a pleasing country church, the tall steeple of which was partly hidden by the

spreading branches of a gigantic elm tree.

"Hot dog!" cried Cobby, when we caught sight of old Popover's cockeyed flivver. "This is the church that we've heard Mrs. Bean tell about. So all we've got to do now is to wait until she and Mr. Bean show up. For you know how strict they are about attending church. They never miss a Sunday."

"But how are we going to make them understand about the treasure?" says I, still excited.

"I bet if we growl," says Cobby, with a wise shake of his head, "and act as though we want them to chase us, they'll catch on. And once we get them started in the right direction the rest will be easy."

A lot of people drove up to the church in their cars, later passing inside. But we saw nothing of our beloved master or mistress. Then, the last bell having rung, following which the organist got busy, we watched our chance and ducked into the vestibule.

Looking back, I can see now that we should have waited outside until church was dismissed. For it isn't right for dogs to stick their noses into sacred places like that and start a rumpus.

But we were crazy to see Mr. Bean. We wanted to tell him in our way about the gold that we had snitched for him, and get him started for the forest. Having forgotten to cover up our tracks, as they led down the hill, it would be just too bad, we agreed, if the returned robbers got to the buried gold ahead of us.

Separating, Cobby took one side of the church and me the other, it having been agreed between us that we were to smell of all the feet until we came to the right ones. After which it would be easy to attract our master's attention. He'd get up to put us out, wondering, of course, how we got there. And then, when we were outside, we could pull that growling trick on him and get him started for the forest.

Coming to the first pair of feet I gave them a healthy sniff. But they weren't the feet I was looking for. The congregation, I noticed, was peculiarly uneasy. This uneasiness increased. Presently one of the ushers got up and opened the windows. There was considerable coughing now. And one old woman with rubber heels and pink stockings sneezed so hard that she dislodged her false teeth. They landed beside me

on the floor. But when she stooped to pick them up, having dropped her handkerchief as an excuse to bend over, she saw nothing of me. For Cobby had told me to work cautiously. And as soon as the old woman's hand came down I ducked.

Not until I overheard one of the men whisper something to another man about a "skunk" did the truth of the situation percolate into my bean. In the excitement of burying the treasure, and everything, I had forgotten all about our bad smell.

Everybody was coughing now. And when Mrs. Popover got up in her new velvet hat to sing a solo, you never heard such a conglomeration of gurgles and shrieks in all your life. It was pretty tough on her, I guess. For she had to swallow a lot of air. I wished now that I was outside. For I didn't want to disgrace Mr. and Mrs. Bean. Nor did I want to be kicked out! And that is what would happen, my common sense told me, if we were discovered.

Working faster, I finally got a whiff of the feet I was searching for. Dear old Mr. Bean! It seemed to me that years had passed since last

I saw him. But his feet were the same marvelous feet! Still, they smelled kind of soapy, too. And I wondered, as I got ready to start him on the road to great riches, if he had been foolish enough to wash them.

The thing to do, I figured, was to give him a gentle nip on the ankle. That would attract his attention. And soon he and I would be outside, after which, Cobby having joined us, we would head for the forest.

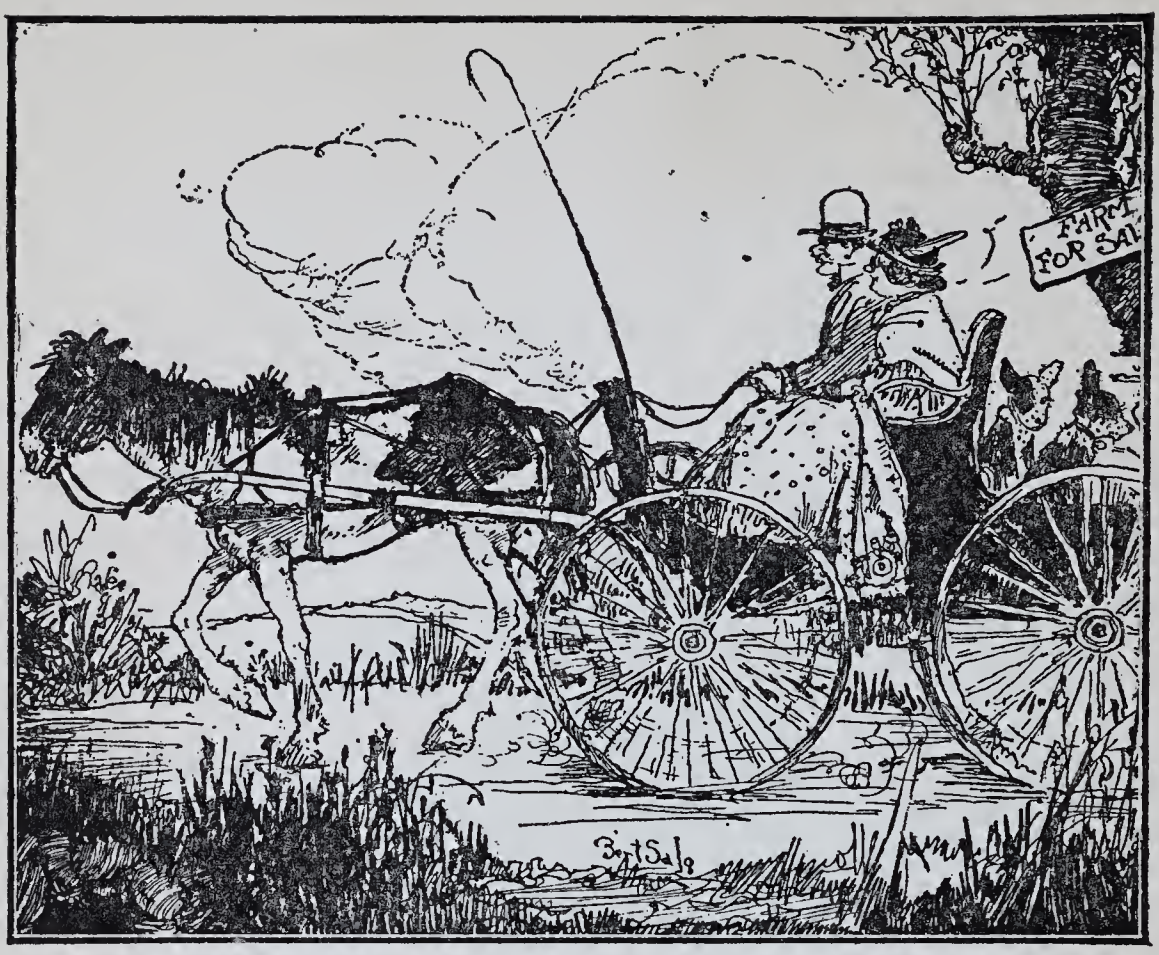
Not until Mr. Bean let out a startled yelp did I realize that I had nipped him too hard. The natural result of carrying too many gold nuggets in my mouth, I guess! Or maybe I was unduly excited. Anyway, he let out a yip, as I say. And thinking that there was a skunk under the seat everybody else in the church started for the door, the organ, as abandoned by its panicky player, sounding for all the world like a giant dying with the green-apple colic.

Here Cobby zipped into sight.

"Quick!" says he, darting into a hole in the church wall. And when I followed him pell-mell, my tail flipping behind like a funny little rudder, what do you know if the two of us didn't

skedaddle on our china ends down the cold-air pipe of the church furnace!

Another case, so to speak, of a pair of "hot-dogs" jumping out of the frying pan into the fire!



"Now Ma, quit jawin' at them poor dogs."

CHAPTER IX

HOME AGAIN

"HOTSY-TOTSY!" says Cobby, with a merry lilt to his voice, as we landed kerplunk at the bottom of the sloping cold-air pipe, our tails still sizzling from the friction.

It took me several minutes to get the kinks out of my tongue.

"Is this a conspiracy?" says I, kind of grumpy-like.

"No," was Cobby's easy reply, "it's a furnace."

Still as bright as ever, I saw!

"But did you actually plan it," I pinned him down, wondering if my flattened nose would ever regain its former aristocratic shape, hitherto a matter of much personal pride with me, "or did it just happen?"

"Be yourself, Tuffy," says he, in a sort of I-suppose-I've-got-to-be-patient-with-him tone of voice. "For how could a mere dog like *me* plan a furnace? You flatter me."

Boy, did I ever want to jump up and down and screech! Flatter him, huh? I'd *flatten* him instead when I got him outside.

"I'm not talking about furnaces," I yelled at him. "I'm talking about this crazy shoot-the-chute stuff. Did *you* know that this was a furnace pipe when you jumped into it?"

"To be frank with you, Tuffy," he acknowledged, "I didn't. But any port is home in a storm," he added airily.

A lot *he* knew about ports!

"But how are we going to get out?" says I, deciding that it would be best not to quarrel with him till we had made our escape.

"Ask me instead," says he, with no show of concern, "why a hen crosses the street."

"What hen?" says I, staring at him. For I could see no sense in talking about a hen now. Yet *he* would. For he's that way.

"Why," says he, with a liberal gesture, "any old hen."

"But why should a hen cross the street?" I swallowed the bait, curious in spite of myself.

"To get on the other side, of course."

And then he laughed in that jolly, happy-go-lucky way of his.

The supposed "skunk" having been traced to its hiding place in the furnace, we now heard men's voices at the other end of the cold-air pipe.

"Yep," cackled old Squire Popover. "It's down thar all right. Fur I kin smell it."

"I'll tell the world it's down there," came another deep voice. "Phew! No dinner for me to-day. And my wife was planning to serve fried chicken, too."

Fried chicken! Thus reminded of the junk that we had been eating since our sojourn, or whatever you call it, in the forest, I suddenly felt weak. For there is nothing I like better than a crisp, crunchy chicken bone. Um-yum-yum! I could almost taste it. But I quit tasting in a jiffy, and backed farther into the dusty furnace, when a rock came bounding down the pipe.

"Thar!" old popcorn-popper separated himself from a triumphant cry. "I made the pesky thing squeal that time."

Here the minister joined the group.

"Let us go outside, gentlemen, and hold our services. It will be a pleasing departure from the usual custom."

"An' leave the skunk?" inquired old popcorn-popper, sorry, I guess, that he couldn't bean us with a few more rocks.

"Before we attempt to dislodge the skunk," was the minister's sensible advice, "I think we ought to put on some old clothes."

"Um. . . . Reckon you're right, parson."

And then they all trailed outside where we later heard them singing: "Let us Crown Him."

I could tell by Cobby's actions that he had been hit. But he wouldn't admit it.

"Never mind me," says he, putting on a sort of careless-like air. "I'm all right."

And I had tried to quarrel with him! Good old Cobby! He was a monkey, all right. And sometimes I got tired of his monkeyshines. But he was a hero, too.

On further investigation we learned that we could crawl in a circle clear around the inside of the furnace jacket. But there was no opening of any sort. And winding up where we started from we sat there in silence, as miserable a pair of pups as this world has ever known. We had figured on doing big things. But instead of having earned the praise of our master, by leading him to the gold pile in the forest, we probably would get the stuffing shook out of us in the end. Or, even worse, we might get a bullet put through us before the cautious skunk hunters discovered our true identity.

For men don't monkey with skunks. I guess not! They sock them and leave them. Things looked bad for us, all right.

And how awful, was our added miserable

thought, if we got socked to sleep before Mr. Bean learned about the buried gold!

Then, as the congregation untangled another hymn, reminding us of the day that we had howled behind the organ, it suddenly occurred to us that here was a chance for us to save our hides. And bracing ourselves, we howled to beat the cars. *Oh,* how we howled! The story was told afterwards that we completely outdistanced the singers themselves. And thus made to realize that what they had mistaken for a skunk was in reality a pair of unfortunate perfumed wild dogs, the men hurriedly pulled the furnace pipes apart, thus releasing us.

And there, blinking at us in the dim light of the church basement, stood Mr. Bean.

"I swan!" says he, staring first at one of us and then at the other. "So it was you who bit me on the ankle, heh? An' *me* thinkin' all the time that it was a skunk." Then he hurried to the basement door. "Ma," he called, standing stoop-shouldered in the doorway. "Hey, ma. Come quick. I've found Tuffy an' Cobby."

Later they took us home in their spraddle-wheeled buggy, Mrs. Bean holding her nose

and Mr. Bean sort of chuckling to himself.

"Now, ma," says he, in his kindly way, "quit jawin' at them poor dogs. For they can't help it if some ol' skunk took after them an' messed them up. That's liable to happen to *anybody*. Like as not they was lost. An' seein' rigs 'round the church naturally they would want to find out if we were there. Dogs are that way, ma. You know it. So let's be kind to them. Then they'll love us all the more."

"Pa," says Mrs. Bean, in a sort of quiet voice, as she looked at him steadily, "you're an old simpleton. And no one knows it any better than I do. But I love you; and I wouldn't change you one bit if I could."

Then, can you imagine it, they kissed each other on the buggy seat right there in broad daylight!

"You're a good woman, ma," he told her, in a kind of choked voice.

"Yes," says she promptly, "and you're a good man, too, even if you do snore and track mud into the house."

"Then you hain't ever bin sorry, ma," he spoke wistfully, "that you married me?"

"My only regret is," says she briskly, "that I didn't marry you sooner. For then I might have reformed you."

After which they both laughed.

"How are you feelin', ma?" he then inquired, as the horse jogged along.

"I never felt better in all my life," came the happy reply.

"Them ol' pains of your'n has completely left you, heh?"

"Yes; thanks to Dr. Markley's skill."

"I finished payin' him the other day," the information was offered.

"That *was* a terrible expense, pa," the woman spoke in a troubled voice.

"I'm only too glad, ma, that the doctor was able to put you back on your feet. An' now, if we both retain our health, maybe we'll be able to build that new porch that you've bin wantin', an' otherwise git the house fixed so that it will be more comfortable for us in our old age."

"We'll let the porch go," says Mrs. Bean, in her brisk way, "until we get the mortgage paid up. As I've told you before, I worry about it. For Squire Popover can be as hard as granite if

he wants to. Friendship means nothing to him in a business deal."

"An' you really think ma," the words were spoken anxiously, "that he'd take our farm away from us if he got the chance?"

"I think he'd do anything if he could add another dollar to his hoard."

"It doesn't seem possible, ma—after all the years that we've lived neighbor to him."

"If you must know the truth, pa, it's an effort for me to be civil to him, doubting him as I do. Yet, I'd never do anything to anger him. For he'd turn on us in a minute if I did."

"No," Mr. Bean spoke hastily, "don't ever offend him, ma. Fur he's got a turrible temper. An' I'd hate to think of what was liable to happen to us if he got down on us."

Then you should have heard the barking as we turned into the farmhouse lane with its familiar trees and sagging fences. For my ma and my pa had caught sight of us in the back part of the buggy, Mrs. Bean having made us ride there for better ventilation.

"Where in the world have you been?" says my ma, taking us in charge.

Cobby stepped around in his big way.

"Look us over," says he. "We're wild dogs now."

"Have you been living in the forest?" a kind of proud look accompanied my ma's words.

"*And* how," says Cobby eloquently.

"Have plenty to eat?" came the added quick inquiry.

"You'd be surprised!" laughed Cobby. "Why," he tacked on, "one day we even had cake and cheese sandwiches for desert."

My ma got my pa's eye.

"What did I tell you," says she triumphantly.

"You win," says he, laughing.

"I told your pa," the words were addressed to us, "that he was foolish to worry about you. There was plenty of stuff in the forest, I said, for you to eat. And plenty of comfortable sleeping places, too. It was a good experience for you, I contended—though, of course, we didn't intend to leave you there forever."

My pa laughed when he heard about the skunks. In some ways, he said, we had acted dumb. But we might have done worse. And all the time I could tell by his actions that

he was mighty proud of us. Good old pa!

"There are certain kinds of roots that dogs can eat," he told us thoughtfully. "Some day I'll show you what they are. Then, if you get caught in the forest again, you won't have to live entirely on crawfish."

"Oof!" says Cobby, turning up his nose. "Why mention the wiggly things?"

"Don't belittle an article of food," preached my pa, "that saved your life."

"I suppose," my ma spoke to Cobby, with dancing eyes, "that it was a big disappointment to you not to bag a gorilla."

"You *would* bring that up," he made a wry face.

"And how about the elephants?" put in my fun-loving pa.

"Let's talk about the weather," evaded Cobby.

Asked then if he had ever heard the story of Ali Baba, my pa nodded, wondering, I guess, as he searched our beaming faces, what that had to do with our incompleted story. Nor would he believe us, at first, when we told him that we had bumped into a similar band of robbers. Except for the fact that they were fewer in num-

ber and smaller, we related, they did exactly as the other band had done, even using the same magic word to open the door of their treasure cave.

"And you actually saw the cave door open?" says my ma, searching our faces, her own the picture of amazement.

"Nothing else but," says Cobby, in his cocky manner.

"But where were you and Tuffy?" came the added inquiry.

"Hiding in the bushes."

"And you're sure," put in my pa, fastening his earnest eyes on us, "that what you mistook for robbers wasn't a gang of boys?"

"Boys," argued Cobby, "don't have long black whiskers."

"A band of dwarfs!" my pa spoke to himself, looking more puzzled than I ever had seen him. "I can't understand it. I never heard of such a thing."

"But who was the big man that you saw?" my ma inquired curiously.

"Another member of the band, I guess. For they all went into the cave together."

"Did he leave the black box that you spoke about in the cave?"

"No. All we found there was the gold."

"But you haven't told us yet," says my pa, "how you got into the cave."

Cobby and I exchanged glances.

"The magic word didn't work for us," he admitted. "And we found out later that the door had been opened with a rope. So we did the same thing."

"But why should the robber captain pretend that he was a magician?" further puzzled my pa.

"That," acknowledged Cobby, "is the one thing we can't explain. And if I must tell you the truth, it was a big surprise to us when we found the gold. For we had about made up our minds that the whole thing was some kind of a joke."

"I think," says my ma, when we further discussed the matter, "that the proper thing for us to do, instead of leading Mr. Bean to the buried treasure, is to go back to the cave to-night and start carrying the gold home, nugget by nugget. It may take us several nights. But what of that?

Considering all the good things that Mr. Bean has done for us, we ought to be glad that we thus have the chance to help him."

My pa laughed.

"I bet he'll be surprised when he wakes up tomorrow morning and finds a row of gold nuggets on the back porch. Nor will he suspect, for one minute, that *we* put them there. Which, to me, is the funny part."

I didn't know how valuable gold was until my pa told me that nuggets of the size that we had described were worth at least a thousand dollars apiece. So you can see how rich Mr. Bean was going to be. And were we ever tickled! Oh, baby!

Everything was quiet on the farm that afternoon. Not a dog was in sight, my ma having told us, in preparation for the coming night's work, to lie down and take a nap.

Harry's pa talked to the figure in the crazy cemetery.

CHAPTER X

MYSTERY

HAVING lost so much sleep in the forest, thanks to bouncing Bella and her crummy outfit, Cobby and I did some tall old snoozing now.

Nor did we hear the commotion that later took place in the farmhouse, Mrs. Bean having

gotten word over the telephone that her only sister was lying at death's door.

My ma woke us up.

"Get up quick," says she, nipping our ears.

"What's the matter?" says I, rubbing my eyes.

"Mrs. Bean is having hysterics. And Mr. Bean is running around the house with his shirt-tail hanging out."

I wondered sleepily, as I jiggled the present and the past together in my mind, what the flopping shirt-tail had to do with the buried nuggets, of which I had been dreaming so blissfully. Could it be, I asked myself, kind of disappointed-like, wanting to surprise him, that Mr. Bean had already heard about his good fortune? And was he celebrating? Still, came the more sensible thought, Mrs. Bean wouldn't cry over that.

Then, having learned the truth of the situation, I hung around the house with my long-faced brothers and sisters while Mrs. Bean got into her black silk "funeral" dress, as she called it, and packed the family suitcase.

"But, pa," she cried, dabbing at her red eyes, "we can't both leave the farm. Somebody's

got to stay here and do the chores, you know."

Thus flagged as he entered the room, Mr. Bean gave his dangling shirt-tail an added excited flip and stopped beside the open suitcase.

"I kin git the Parker boy to help me," he waggled. "An' don't you think fur one minute, ma," he gave himself a businesslike air, "that I'm going to let you start out on the bus all alone. Not by a jugful. It's only twenty miles, I know. But you're all I've got. An' I'm goin' to make it my business to see that you're taken care of. That's more important to me than corn shocks an' swill barrels. . . . Did you put in my fancy nightshirt, ma?"

"Laws-a-me!" came the dismayed exclamation. "I *thought* that was your nightshirt in the bottom of the suitcase. But it's a dirty sheet. I'm so unnerved, pa," the speaker glanced up, "that I hardly know whether I'm standing or sitting. And sister Ella looked *so* well the last time I saw her, having gotten rid of those disfiguring ear warts. But I suppose she's been stuffing herself with green-apple pie. *She* would. And it never did agree with her. One summer, when she was a girl, we had to use a

stomach pump on her three times. Nor did she get any sympathy from us when she tried to let on that the doctor had pumped vital things out of her that she never ate. For it was generally conceded in the family that her imagination was as big as her feet. . . . Hand me those polka-dot stockings, pa. *No,* not the stove poker—you big simpleton! That's it. I may have to wear them to the funeral if Ella's black ones are full of holes. And now tuck in your shirt-tail, pa. Mercy me! I've told you to do it a dozen times."

We later watched them drive away in the old buggy. And then a lanky, quiet-acting boy with a soapy smell came to the farm to do the chores.

I had heard about Harry Parker and his queer-acting father. People wondered why Mr. Parker, at one time an experienced butter-maker, had let his crossroads creamery go to rack and ruin. And later they had further wondered why he didn't sell the place. For it was generally known throughout the countryside that an oil company, in which Squire Popover had a heavy interest, had offered to buy the

creamery, wanting to make over the building into a combination repair shop and filling station. It was an ideal location for a business of that kind. But, as mentioned, Mr. Parker stubbornly refused to sell. And there he and his motherless son lived in dingy, cramped quarters, Harry attending school in the neighboring town of Rockdale.

I never had been around such a quiet boy. And I wondered, as I followed him in and out of the barn, where he properly performed his work, if he was troubled about something. He looked kind of troubled. I hoped, though, as I recalled some of the stories that I had heard about his father, that the moody parent hadn't been whipping him.

Then, who should drive into the yard but old popcorn-popper himself! Bumpety-bumpety-bumpety-bump! That's the way his car sounded, four-wheeled wreck that it was. I watched him climb out and approach the farmhouse. Knocking unsuccessfully on both the front and the back doors, he then headed stiffly for the barn, where Harry was busy bedding down the remaining horses.

"Um . . ." grunted the newcomer, showing by his actions that he had recognized the worker. "Whar's ol' Bean an' his wife?"

"They've gone away," says Harry shortly.

"What do you mean by that?" came the added sharp inquiry.

"Mrs. Bean got word that her sister in Martinville, twenty miles from here, is very ill. And they've gone over there to take care of her."

"Humph! It never occurred to Bean, I suppose, that he might better have stayed at home to look after his own affairs."

Harry, I saw, didn't like the bossy old geezer any better than I did.

"He'll be home in a few days," the words were spoken quietly, as the boy continued his work.

"An' does that mean," old popcorn-popper grunted, "that you're the chief cook an' bottle-washer 'round here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you don't do a better job of running the farm than your father did of runnin' his creamery, I wouldn't give much fur the place by the time its shiftless owner shows up."

Harry's fingers trembled as he gripped the handle of the hay fork that he was using.

"If you were a boy," says he steadily, "I'd sock you one."

Which so surprised the important-acting visitor that all he could do for a moment or two was to stand there and stare.

"Pa's failure," the younger one then went on, "is none of your business. And if you know what's good for you you'll keep your mouth shut. For you have no business to run him down simply because he won't sell out to you."

Evidently something had happened to upset old popcorn-popper. For his temper was all on edge.

"Your father's a fool," came the added outburst. "He showed it when he let his creamery business go to pot. And he's showing it now. For why shouldn't he sell out to me? I've offered him a fair price."

"Evidently he doesn't want to sell."

"Well, he *will* sell," the man's temper completely got away from him.

"You can't make him sell," says Harry, whose eyes reminded me of bits of polished steel.

"And I'm going to tell him what you said, too. So watch your step, big boy, if you want to do business with us. Your money doesn't make you a king. You can't force people to knuckle down to you. Pa's queer, I'll admit. He does things I can't explain. And I'll grant that he was foolish to neglect his business. But he did it. And instead of condemning him, like a lot of people around here, I feel sorry for him. He's in trouble. He shows it. And I wish you'd leave him alone."

"He'll sell out to me," stormed the angry money-maker, "or I'll break him."

"Yah," says Harry, sort of gritting his teeth, "and I'd like to break your nose, too, you old bully."

Which, of course, gave old popcorn-popper an awful turn, as his purple face showed. For he wasn't used to having people talk that way to him, much less a boy. However he took himself off without further words when two Boy Scouts rode into the yard on their bicycles.

Having followed the newcomers up the lane, Cobby quickly got my ear.

"It's Joe Simonsen and Al Kenseth," says he,

as the boys jumped off their wheels and approached the barn, old popcorn-popper's flivver having disappeared down the country road.

My ma was listening.

"Then you know them?" she inquired quickly of Cobby.

"Sure thing," he laughed. "We met them in the forest. And it was their chocolate cake that furnished us with desert."

The Scouts, it seems, had heard that Harry was working here, which explained their visit.

"Faint heart never won fair lady," laughed Joe, as the three boys met in the barn door. "So here we are, stronger than new horse-radish."

"Meaning which?" says Harry, having already put old popcorn-popper out of his mind.

"Kid, you've simply *got* to join our patrol," Joe dropped his light manner and got down to business. "We've asked you before. And I can't understand why you keep turning us down. You know the gang. They're all friends of yours. So come on and join. Don't be a bullhead."

There was a peculiar wistful look in Harry's eyes.

"I'd like to join, fellows," he spoke earnestly. "You know that. But, as I've told you before, pa isn't in favor of it."

"What's the matter with him?" came Joe's blunt inquiry. "Doesn't he want you to have a good time?"

Harry was loyal.

"Scouting isn't everything," he evaded.

"I bet he'd let you join," persisted Joe, "if we put it up to him in the right way."

"No," Harry quickly shook his head. "Don't go near him, fellows. He'd just turn on you. That's the way he's been acting lately. He used to like boys. But he doesn't any more. Sometimes I wonder if he even likes me! Still, I shouldn't have said that," the speaker's face flushed. "Of course, he likes me. He's just queer, that's all. As for joining the Scouts, you know, fellows, that your friendship means a lot to me. You know, too, that I'd like to be in your patrol. But I can't do it. I absolutely can't. So please say nothing more about it."

"Shucks!" Joe voiced his disappointment. "I thought sure you'd join when you learned that we were still saving a place for you in the pa-

trol. Besides we're going on a hike to-morrow night. And will *you* ever lose out if you pass it up. For we're going to invade a cemetery and everything."

"You know the place," put in Al. "It's full of queer statues."

A peculiar frightened look crossed Harry's face.

"Not the Morton cemetery!" he cried.

"Sure thing," nodded Al. "That's the place."

"Don't tell us," laughed Joe, who had noticed the change in Harry's face, "that you've heard the howling dog, too!"

"No," Harry slowly shook his head, "I've never heard it. But the neighbors say it *does* howl at midnight."

"A stone dog!" jeered Joe. "Tell us next that wooden hitching-posts can recite poetry."

"Who was old Morton anyway?" Al inquired.

"A wealthy coal man," informed Harry. "Born near here, he made his money in Kentucky. People say he was cracked. And I guess he was, all right. For those statues that he brought back with him are the craziest things

I've ever seen. He had them erected on the site of his old home just before he died. The one of himself on horseback cost almost ten thousand dollars. It isn't a regular cemetery. For he's the only one buried there. But having supplied statues of the entire family, his pet dog included, it looks like a regular cemetery. And there the statues stand like a lot of stone scarecrows, the women dressed in bustles and long skirts, their stone eyes all turned in the same direction. *I* wouldn't want to stay there all night. Honest, fellows. And I bet you don't either when it comes right down to business."

"Isn't it close to your place?" one of the interested Scouts then inquired.

Harry nodded.

"Well," Al gave a jerky laugh, "don't be surprised if you hear us pounding on your door tomorrow night. For if that stone dog chases us, we'll have to seek shelter some place."

"Where are you going to sleep?" Harry then inquired. "In pup tents?"

"Pup tents, your granny," snorted Joe. "We're going to sleep in Morton's old log house."

"Boy, if *he* doesn't crawl out of his grave and chase you birds down the hill, I miss my guess."

"Better join us, Harry," came the laughing invitation.

"No, thanks," the words were spoken hastily. "I've heard too many things about that old house and the surrounding statues to ever want to spend a night there."

"You're fooling," grinned Al.

"To the contrary," Harry spoke earnestly, "I'm more afraid of that cemetery than anything else in the whole world. And I sometimes think that pa wouldn't be so queer if he kept away from it. It seems to draw him like a magnet. Fellows," the speaker's earnestness deepened, "I didn't tell this to old Popover, but I'll tell it to you—pa's got some queer secret locked up inside of him. I've known it for months. But he won't talk to me. Wanting to help him, I've asked him questions, but he tells me to shut up. And then he usually runs up the hill to that crazy cemetery. I followed him one night. It was a winter night, too, with snow on the ground. There was a moon. It made queer

shadows under the bare trees. I thought I'd shiver to death. Nor was it a *cold* shiver either. It was those crazy statues, I guess. Pa was talking to the mounted figure. Sort of begging and pleading. But my ears weren't sharp enough to hear what he said. And maybe it's just as well that I didn't hear. For secrets are bad things to know sometimes. But please don't repeat this, fellows. And if you see him there tomorrow night, don't say anything to him. I'm hoping, though, that he'll stay at home."

A horse having gotten out of its stall, Harry then disappeared into the barn on the run, Joe and Al starting down the lane.

"For the love of mud!" says Joe, as he got ready to mount his bicycle. "I don't know whether I care to spend the night in that crazy old log house or not."

"I've heard," says Al, glancing back at the barn, "that Harry's father is blamed queer. But I don't see how a private cemetery could make him queer. Do you?"

"No," Joe shook his head. "But let's not say anything about it to the other Scouts. For that was Harry's wish. Besides, if we got the gang

all worked up, and nothing happened, they'd razz us for the next six months."

"But what *could* happen?" persisted Al. "Certainly you aren't expecting the stone dog to come to life."

"We may get a surprise if Mr. Parker shows up," shrugged Joe.

And I don't mind telling you in advance that they *did* get a surprise. And a big one, too. For I was there. So was Cobby. And did *we* ever shiver and shake! Man, oh, man!

Those creepy stone statues all stared in the same direction.

CHAPTER XI

MOONLIT STATUES

WORKING around the farm till dark, Harry then started for home, telling us, as he gave us a final friendly pat on the head, that he'd return bright and early the following morning.

"I don't know what I'm going to feed you," he laughed. "For it's a cinch you can't eat oats

and hay, like the horses. But I'll see that you get some kind of food," he promised.

Which shows you what a good boy he was. For not all boys would have remembered our needs. I liked him better every minute. I hoped, too, as I recalled some of the things that I had overheard in the barn, that he'd get permission later on to join the Scouts, as he wanted to do. Having fallen hard for Joe and Al, another pair of good boys, I kind of wished that I could be a Boy Scout myself. For I could readily imagine what a lot of fun the Scouts would have on their proposed over-night hike.

As for old popcorn-popper, what *he* deserved, I told myself grimly, was a good swift kick in the seat of the pants. And I hoped he'd get it, too, with a few bats on the bean to boot, if he tried any monkeyshines with Harry's pa.

I hadn't seen the creamery man myself. But from what I had heard about him I was inclined to believe that he could hold his own, even with an old pill like Popover. Yet how unfortunate, was my added distressed thought, that a swell boy like Harry should have such a poor excuse of a man for a father.

What had happened to the creamery man, I wondered, to thus wreck his whole life? He used to be a fine fellow, I was told. But now he was a nut. Fancy him skinning up a hill in the dead of winter to do a monologue in front of a marble statue! And there was that added junk about the stone dog howling at midnight! All interesting stuff, of course. But about as probable as cats and mice keeping house together.

"I'd like to hear it," says Cobby, sort of thoughtful-like, as we sat beside the leaning windmill tower and watched the moon jiggle itself into the sky.

"What?" says I.

"The stone dog," says he.

"You must have been reading my thoughts," says I, giving him a queer look.

"Are you game, Tuffy?" says he.

"Meaning which?" says I guardedly. For usually when he talked that way we got into trouble.

"Let's do some exploring to-night," says he.

"But I thought we were going to tote gold nuggets," says I.

"Not to-night," he shook his head. "For my

pa thinks we better leave the nuggets where they are till Mr. Bean gets home. Which suits me O.K. For we *would* be dumb to spread the nuggets around on the back porch and then have somebody with sticky fingers skin out with them."

"Harry wouldn't," says I quickly.

"How about old Popover?" came the reminder.

"It's a good thing for Mr. Bean," says I, "that we found the nuggets and thus have things fixed up to his advantage. For he'd get kicked out of here in a jiffy if old popcorn-popper got the upper hand of him."

"Tuffy," says Cobby pleasantly, "it's surprising how perfectly you and I agree on some points."

"Yah," says I, "and it's surprising how scheming people like the Popovers have the nerve to come here and sponge meals. Mrs. Bean ought to feed them on biscuits flavored with carbolic acid."

"I'm wondering," says Cobby, sort of reflective-like, "if Mrs. Popover is as crooked as he is."

"Probably not," says I, wanting to be fair. "But I'd never pick her for a mistress in preference to a woman like Mrs. Bean."

"We've got a good home, Tuffy," Cobby then expressed himself feelingly.

"I'll tell the world," was my spirited reply.

"Did you see the big supper that Mrs. Bean set out for us before she left?"

"*See* it?" I laughed. "Boy, I ate two-thirds of it."

"I noticed some one sitting in the middle of the dish," he gave me a kind of cold eye.

"That was me," says I merrily.

"We probably won't fare as well to-morrow," he predicted.

"But why worry about it," says I genially, "when we've got an expert gorilla hunter in the family."

Nor did the sour look that he shot my way completely pickle me.

"Well," says he, hurrying back to his original question, "do we or don't we?"

Here my ma sort of scooted up behind us and socked on the brakes.

"If you're talking about sneaking out to-

night," says she, sort of sharp-like, "I can tell you right now that you *don't*. For you've been gadding around too much lately. Roaming dogs get into trouble. And I'm not going to have it said in the neighborhood that my pups are tramps."

Which ended *that!*

"What do you suppose ma did last night?" says Cobby, when I untangled my eyelashes the following morning.

"What?" says I. "Snore?"

"Humph!" he grunted. "How could she snore when she didn't even go to sleep? If you must know the truth, Tuffy, she and pa were on the gad all night long."

"Evidently," says I, thus made to realize that I'd soon have to strike out for myself, trusting to my own judgment and making my own way, "she wants us to do as she says but not as she does."

"We've had good bringing up," says Cobby, whose thoughts were much the same as mine. "But we're big enough now to take a look at the world ourselves. So be ready to-night, Tuffy, as I'm bound and determined to get a

squint at those statues. Nor need you look so sober about it either. Our ma knows that she can trust us. And if we do give her the slip tonight I bet a cookie that she laughs about it. For she knows that we're bound to sneak out sooner or later. All dogs do that. So let's strike out for ourselves," he gave a big gesture. "Let's show our independence."

To tell the truth I kind of hated the thought of growing up. For my puppy days had been crowded full of care-free fun. It was nice to have my ma take care of me. But common sense told me, as Cobby pointed out, that I couldn't always be a puppy. Nor was it improbable, I further considered the matter, that my ma, in spite of her protecting talk, wanted me to strike out for myself. That may have been her motive in running around nights.

Harry spent the day at the farm. And it seemed to me, as I followed him around, that he looked more troubled-like than ever. It kind of worried me. And convinced now that I'd see strange things if I hung around the place where the statues were, I eagerly fell in with Cobby's idea.

So, when Harry went home that night, having worked till dusk, we followed him, keeping out of sight in the bushes and weeds that paralleled the country road. After a brisk walk of fifteen or twenty minutes he turned in at the side door of a huge, dreary-looking building, set close beside the road, but around which the weeds now grew several feet high. One could see, all right, that the business had gone to pot.

"Did you have supper, pa?" we heard our new friend inquire, as we sort of hunched ourselves under an open window, through which we caught sight of a tall, gaunt-looking man.

"Yes," was the short, gruff reply, as the speaker moved away from the window.

"Save anything for me?" came the added inquiry.

"You usually get your share, don't you?" the words were spoken with a snarl.

There was a pause during which, I guess, Harry picked up a cookie or two.

"How are you feeling to-night, pa?"

"Humph! I should think you'd get tired of asking that," came the ungracious reply. "Certainly, I get tired of hearing it."

"But I want to help you," cried Harry. And though we couldn't see him I could tell by the tone of his voice that he was in tears. "Gosh! You don't know how it hurts me to have you act this way. You ought to know that you can trust me. Why," came the youthful outburst, "I'd do anything for you. So please confide in me, pa."

"I'll take a stick to you," the words were spoken angrily, "if you don't dry up."

"But you can't go on like this forever," Harry stood his ground. "The neighbors are talking about you. They know you beat me. And you ought to see the way the boys look at you! They think you're an old brute. As though I *would* join the Scouts and have them see the black-and-blue marks on my body! That's the main reason why I turned them down, though, of course, I realized that you don't want them hanging around here. But you didn't used to be that way. What changed you, pa? Won't you please tell me? If you've done something wrong I'll help you square yourself. Then we'll sell out to old Popover and move away. You'll feel different if you lose sight of those crazy statues."

"I'll never sell out to Popover at the price he

is offering," the man snarled, despondently.

"And will you sell," came the eager inquiry, "if I get him to double his offer?"

"Much less than doubling it," the man spoke disappointed-like, "he's liable to lower it, as he told me to-day when he stopped here."

"But he's just bluffing you, pa. If he didn't want the place real bad he wouldn't hang around here. And he'll double his offer in a minute if he gets a hunch that some other oil company is liable to step in ahead of him. Let me handle him!" came the eager request. "I'll bring him to terms in a jiffy, if I can get another buyer on the string."

"Harry," the man spoke in a changed, choked voice, "you're a good boy. I don't deserve your affection. And I *would* like to sell out and leave here. But I'm not going to give the place away. Those stone eyes! They stare at me night and day! They were put there to haunt me! See!" the voice became hysterical. "They are staring at me now, as they stand up there in the moonlight! And the dog! I didn't mean to kill it. I was nervous. Those weird statues frightened me. I got the wrong drug. And the

dog died. It's the same dog, Harry. And it's the same man. Both turned to stone! I pored over the mystery at first. There was a reason, I told myself, daily becoming more puzzled, why the statues had been brought here, their stony eyes constantly searching the creamery. And then, as I continued to brood over the mystery, even neglecting my business, I found my mind slipping away from me. It is only at times like this that I really know what I'm doing. But don't let them take me away, Harry. I'd sooner die than have that happen to me."

Cobby's eyes were as big as teacups.

"Suffering cats!" he squeaked. "I'd hate to roost on the same perch with that bird. For he's crazier than a cockeyed bedbug."

"Poor Harry!" I spoke sympathetically. And I meant it, too, just as I said it. For I had learned to love him in the short time that I had known him. And what a miserable home this was for a boy like him.

"*He* thinks," says Cobby, referring to the crazy man, "that the statues were brought here to haunt him. So he must have a guilty conscience."

"He admits," says I, "that he laid out a dog."

"A *dog!*" snorted Cobby, in that wise way of his. "I'd sooner think it was old Morton himself."

"Cobby!" I cried, aghast.

Then, hearing young voices beyond the creamery, we ran up the hill, at the top of which, shut in by brooding pine trees, was an old log cabin, the windows and doors of which had long since disappeared.

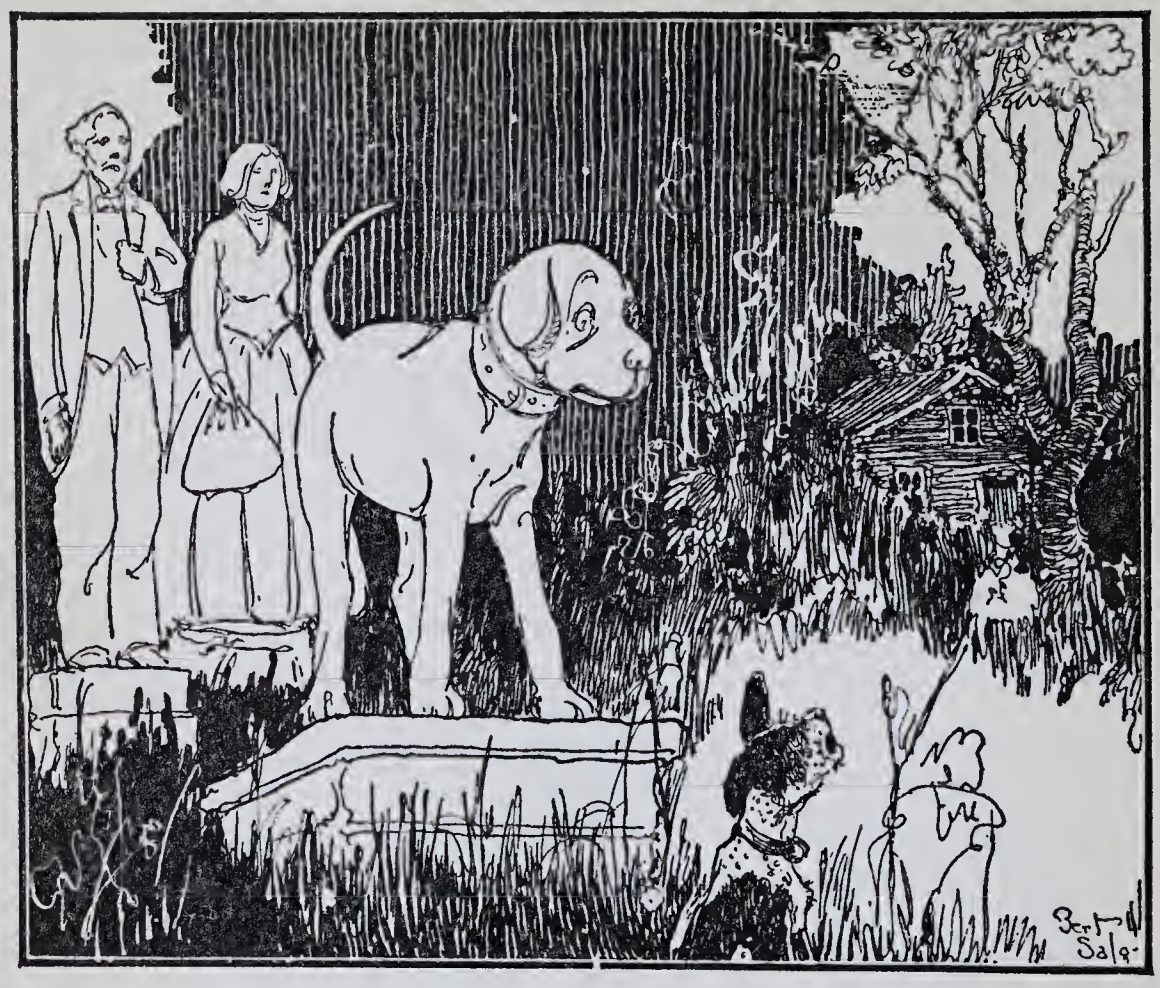
It was here that the assembled Scouts planned to spend the night, having brought suitable bedding and food. We could see them running through the empty house, which rang with their merry shouts. And then, as great armfuls of wood were brought in by the eager workers, we caught sight of a cheerful blaze.

Gathered around the aged fireplace, with its mounting, flickering flame, the merrymakers told stories and cracked jokes. There was a lot of monkeyshines. For boys are that way. And we heard truck about ghosts and haunted houses.

I didn't believe in ghosts myself. Nor did Cobby. But as I looked around the clearing, with its scattered white statues, chief among

them the moonlit image of an immense crouching dog, I had to admit that there was an unexplainable spookiness in the crowding atmosphere.

If it was shivers that the boys wanted, I told myself, with a prickly backbone, they certainly had picked out the right spot!



He let out some of the gooiest howls you ever heard.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN THE DOG HOWLED

COBBY and I weren't used to sights like this, so we took another trip through the moonlit art gallery.

"Humph!" says he, turning up his funny little nose at the stone dog. "Who's scared of you?"

"What kind of a dog is it?" says I, taking a closer squint at the stone hunk.

"Looks like a Siberian soup-hound to me," came the nonsensical reply.

Then we went over and did some professional sniffing around the stone horse's front feet.

"Let's bite him on the shins," I growled, in fun, "and make him jump."

"Yah," says Cobby, turning away, "that *would* be a good way for you to put your jaw-bone out of joint."

As Harry had said, the statues all faced the same way, their stone eyes seemingly fastened on the same object. And that's what made them look so queer, I guess. Could it be true, I asked myself, as I caught sight of the moonlit creamery at the foot of the hill, that the statues had indeed been placed here to haunt the butter-maker, as he suspected? Or was that just a crazy notion of his?

Cobby stopped in front of the three long-gowned figures in the back row, whom we nick-named Faith, Hope and Charity.

"It's easy enough to tell that they're sisters," says he. "For they all look alike."

"Yah," says I, "and it's easy enough to tell that the four men in the front row are Morton's brothers, too."

"How about these little girls?" my attention was then drawn to the smallest statues in the scattered group, of which the mounted horseman was the chief figure.

"One of them," I joked, "is Orphan Annie. And the other is Goldilocks."

"I like Annie the best," laughed Cobby. "For she's got the longest nose."

"Do you call that thing a nose?" says I, sort of critical-like. "It looks more like a mud-dauber's nest to me."

"By George!" cried Cobby, taking a closer squint at the stone face. "I believe you're right for once in your life."

"Anyway," says I, favoring the other statue, "Goldilocks has the biggest mouth."

"Wouldn't it be fun," laughed Cobby, in his mischievous way, "if we could turn the statues around? Then the women in the back row wouldn't have to stand there day after day, looking at their brothers' petrified coat-tails."

"Maybe the brothers *do* turn around," I

waggled, "when it gets good and dark. For if the stone dog can come to life, and howl, why can't the men?"

Which gave Cobby a fine chance to poke fun at me.

"Whoever heard of a man howling!" he jeered.

Our tour of the open-air art gallery having come to an end, so to speak, we wound up in front of the mounted central figure, where Cobby, always on the lookout for fun, gave a sort of military salute.

"Hi," says he chummily. "How's the weather up there, old stone face?"

I grabbed him.

"Look out!" I cried, pretending that the indignant stone horseman was coming to life. "He's going to ride you down."

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" says Cobby, stepping around as big as cuffy. "If that old four-legged crow-bait of his ever stepped on *me* he'd get something worse than a tack in his tire. For I'm sharp, kid. Why, I dassn't even lick my own tail for fear of nicking it!"

Laughing at his nonsense, I then gave closer

attention to the stone rider's cold stern face.

"Do you suppose," says I, glancing around at the artistic collection, "that these statues were put here by old Morton himself?"

"That's Harry's story," a thoughtful nod accompanied Cobby's words.

"Then it may be that the butter-maker is right," says I, with growing excitement. "For it does look as though the statues were all turned in his direction."

Cobby, in turn, studied the stern carved face.

"He looks like the kind of a man who would delight in persecuting an enemy. A *schemer.* That's what *he* is. His face shows it. And in the end he may have been knocked off, just as I said at the foot of the hill."

"I hope not," says I, thinking of Harry.

The Scouts, in the meantime, had been having a lot of fun. And attracted to the door of the old cabin by their continued laughter, we found them sitting in a semicircle around the roaring fire. The one they called Rubber Gullet was eating a sandwich. As we watched the merrymakers, wondering if we dared to join them, Joe and Al got up and sang a song:

The butterfly has wings of gauze,
The firefly wings of flame,
The bedbug has no wings at all
But he gets there just the same.

"How about that camping song of ours?" inquired another Scout, who sort of had the notion, I guess, that he had musical talents of his own.

"All right," says Joe, acting as leader. "Let's start."

And here's the song they sang:

We're bummers, we're bummers,
We're a long ways from home,
And if you don't like us
You can leave us alone.
We eat when we're hungry,
We drink when we're dry,
And if camping don't kill us
We'll live till we die.

"I wonder how old Morton likes that?" grinned one of the grand-opera stars, as he squinted through the cabin doorway at the nearby statues.

"Go out and ask him," came the laughing dare.

"Br-r-r-r!" the speaker let on that he was afraid. "You *would* like to see that stone dog chase me down the hill."

"What time does the dog howl?" one of the smaller Scouts then piped up.

"At midnight, of course," grunted Al, stirring the fire.

"Aw, shucks!" squeaked the little Scout, whose nickname, we learned, was Short Change. "Do we have to wait that long?"

"Not necessarily," says Cobby in my ear.

"Meaning which?" says I quickly.

"If need be," says he, with twinkling eyes, "we can do some howling for them."

"They don't really expect to hear the dog howl," says I. "They just talk that way to make a noise. You know how boys are."

"But what would happen," laughed Cobby, "if the dog did howl?"

"I imagine," says I, sort of picturing the situation in my mind, "that they would be scared stiff."

"Then let us do it," came the eager suggestion.

And why not, I asked myself quickly? It

would be fun. So we hurried over to where the stone dog was. And as soon as the moon skidded behind a cloud we tuned up, dishing out one of the gooiest, groggiest howls that you ever heard in all your born days, after which we sensibly flipped ourselves into the bushes.

The cabin had settled into sudden silence. Then, as the moon came out and made a bow, we caught sight of Al's frightened face in the doorway.

"I can see it," says he, in a low voice, referring to the stone dog.

"Is it moving?" Short Change finally dragged his voice out of his shoes.

"No," Al shook his head.

"Let's go out and take a closer look at it," says Joe daringly.

And then did *we* ever hug the ground as they approached our hiding place, Joe leading, sort of picking his way step by step, and Short Change bringing up the rear.

"Boy," squawked Rubber Gullet, when they were directly opposite us, "that's the worst scare *I* ever had."

Al grunted, "You didn't stop eating!"

"Gosh!" gurgled Rubber Gullet. "I *did* have a sandwich, didn't I?"

"Sure thing," says Al. "You always do."

"But where is it?" the speaker showed a pair of empty hands.

"Oh, you probably swallowed the whole thing in one scared bite."

They were close to the dog now.

"Touch it," some one nudged Short Change.

"Me?" came the frightened, gooey squawk. "I should say not!"

"What are you scared of, hydrophobia?"

"Boy, I'd hate to have a stone dog bite me. For what do you bet I wouldn't get stone-bruises!"

"And you're the guy who was so anxious to hear it!" some one sneered.

"You touch it, Joe," urged Short Change.

In time, of course, they learned that the crouching dog was just as stony and lifeless as ever.

"It must have been some other dog," Joe thus sought to explain the mystery.

"Let's watch and find out," came the suggestion.

"Sure thing," agreed Al. "Let Short Change watch."

"Go lay an egg," says Short Change. "For if anybody happens to ask you my ma didn't raise me to be a howl investigator."

"I'd watch," came cheerfully from Rubber Gullet, "if I had something to eat."

"Suffering cats!" screeched Joe, clutching at his hair. "I wish that blamed dog *would* come to life and scare some of those hungry ideas out of your head."

"Yah," Rubber Gullet let on that he was peeved, "you *would* like to see me starve to death."

"Let's go back to the cabin," grunted Joe, sort of disgusted-like.

"Then you're satisfied," says Al, giving the statues a final earnest glance, "that what we heard was a real dog?"

"Of course," snorted Joe. "And were we ever dumb to suspect for one minute that it was the stone dog. A swell bunch of Boy Scouts *we* are. We'll be running away from our shadows next."

"And now what comes next?" says I to Cobby,

as the campers disappeared into their cabin.

"We might wait till midnight," says Cobby, "and give them another serenade."

"I'd hate to think of what would happen to us," says I, kind of anxious-like, "if they caught us."

"Shucks! We can easily beat it down the hill."

"Anyway," says I, "a joke is never so good when you repeat it."

But when Cobby gets an idea in his head you might just as well try to move a mountain. So we stuck around. And pretty soon we heard the boys getting ready for bed.

"Some one hide the boiled ham," says Joe, as he spread his blanket on the floor. "For if Rubber Gullet ever got a crack at it in his sleep I can imagine how it would suffer."

Cobby got his mouth close to my ear.

"Boiled ham!" says he, sort of smacking his lips.

"And now what?" says I, quickly searching his face.

"Don't tell me," he laughed, "that you've lost your appetite for boiled ham?"

"Yah," says I, as I got the drift of his thoughts, "and you're liable to lose your tail, too, or some other vital part of your crazy anatomy, if you get caught in that cabin."

"*Me* get caught?" says he, dishing out one of his big gestures. "Shucks! You seem to overlook the fact, Tuffy, that I'm an experienced boa constrictor hunter. *I* know how to do it."

"Cobby," says I, with mounting uneasiness, "I think you're inviting trouble. And I wish for once that you'd listen to me and leave that boiled ham alone."

But I've told you how determined he is. And having waited till everything was quiet in the cabin he sort of tiptoed through the doorway. I could see him threading his way among the forms on the floor. Then, as he came to a dark corner of the room, he disappeared.

And now comes the shivery part of my story. I was parked outside of the cabin, as I say. And I was kind of scared, too. For Cobby was taking big risks. If the Scouts caught him messing around in their food they'd give him a good beating. I was prepared for a surprised

yelp. But what I heard instead was one of the *awfullest* howls that this world has ever known.

I know something about howls. I'm not easily fooled. So please believe me when I tell you that the howl I heard that night was not an earthly howl.

Yes, you guessed it. The stone dog had come to life!

He touched the stone dog with trembling fingers.

CHAPTER XIII

HIDDEN IN THE THICKET

COBBY didn't stop now to pick his way among the sleeping Scouts. I guess not! For common sense told him that they'd soon be on their feet. And then how lovely for him if they caught him waltzing around the room with their precious boiled ham! Suspecting that *he* was the

offending howler (the howling had ceased as suddenly as it came), they'd pounce on him in a jiffy, later supplying the needed calla lilies and slow music.

Yes, Cobby was in a fix. There was no doubt about that. But he still clung to the boiled ham, determined little squirt that he was. Having risked his life to get it, so to speak, he hated to kiss it good-by. It was the fruit of his toil, as the minister says. I could hear him coming. Bumpety-bumpety-bumpety-bump! I could hear the Scouts, too, as they jumped angrily to their feet, the boiled ham having socked them more or less gently in its flying passage across the room.

"It was a lion," squawked Rubber Gullet. "I heard it roar. And then it made a stepping-stone of my face."

"Don't worry," grunted Joe. "For it would take more than a lion to spoil *your* face."

"But my nose is flat," further squawked Rubber Gullet, as he gingerly inspected the damaged organ.

"Well, get a pair of ice tongs and pull it out again," came the blunt advice, Joe having more

important things to think about just then than flattened noses.

Here Short Change came to life.

"It wasn't a lion," he squeaked. "It was an effalent."

"A *which?*" demanded Joe, as he dropped an armful of wood on the fire, the mounting flame of which soon filled the cabin with dancing light.

"An effalent," repeated Short Change. "One of those big-eared things," he explained, with elaborate gestures, "that has a tail at each end and eats peanuts."

"Suffering cats!" yelled Al. "He means an elephant."

"Sure thing," says Short Change cheerfully. "That's what I said. And did it ever take a mean crack at my ribs with its hind foot! Sweet essence of sauerkraut! If I don't end up in the hospital it will be a wonder."

Joe darted across the room, his wits now on the jump.

"It's that blamed dog," he bellowed.

"Not the stone dog!" Short Change separated himself from another juicy squeal.

"Naw!" the speaker acted as though he was going to chaw the smaller one's head off. "I'm talking about the dog that howled. Not satisfied with scaring us, it came back when we were asleep and snitched our ham."

"Oh, oh, oh!" Rubber Gullet rolled his eyes in despair. "Now we *will* starve to death."

In the meantime Cobby and I had lugged the stolen ham into the bushes, where we covered it with dead leaves.

"You certainly were lucky," says I, referring to his escape from the cabin.

"It wasn't luck," says he, sort of strutting around in front of me.

And then he laughed.

I could read his conceited thoughts. But I didn't razz him. For, if you must know the truth, I was mighty proud of him. He had imagination. And what is more important he had the necessary grit to back it up. Good old Cobby! I sure was lucky, I told myself, loving him with my eyes, to have him for a brother.

Still, I hated to think that he was a thief. And I wished that he had left the ham where it belonged. For we really didn't need it. But

I didn't say anything. For after his narrow escape I was only too glad to have him safely near me.

I followed him to the other side of the clearing, where we peeped guardedly through the bushes, ready to scoot for our lives if the occasion required it. For that Siberian soup-hound, as we called it, was about twenty-six times as big as we were. And least of all, did we care to have the stony hunk roll down the hill on top of us.

But, strangely, the dog stood there as stiff-legged and as lifeless as ever!

"Boy," says Cobby, kind of tugging at his head, "this is getting gosh-awful deep."

"I'm sure," says I, similarly puzzled, "that it was the dog that we heard."

"I thought so, too," nodded Cobby. "But it's a cinch the blame thing isn't alive now."

Then, as the Scouts tumbled out of the cabin, armed with clubs, telling each other in a I-don't-mean-maybe tone of voice what they'd do to the suspected thief if they got a crack at him, we backed deeper into the protecting thicket.

"Maybe we better scoot for home," says I,

kind of anxious-like, as the separated dog-hunters began to systematically beat the bushes with their clubs.

"As though I would," snorted Cobby, as daring as ever, "until I had learned the truth about that stone dog."

I could see now that doubts were beginning to creep into his head. And I wondered myself, as the more sensible part of my mind got to work, if we hadn't let our imaginations play a trick on us.

For how could a stone dog howl?

"What did it sound like to you, Tuffy?" Cobby then inquired, thoughtfully.

"Well," I spoke carefully, wanting to explain myself as clearly as possible, "it had a *different* sound. Sort of unreal. As though it had been corked up in a bottle and suddenly released."

"Which," waggled Cobby, "is exactly the way it sounded to me, too. It was a howl, all right. But it wasn't a real howl. It was a sort of *manufactured* howl."

I looked at him helplessly.

"You're getting in too blamed deep for me," says I.

"I thought at first that it was a ghost," he continued thoughtfully. "For that's what the stone dog would be, all right, if it did come to life. But you can see for yourself that the statue hasn't moved a particle. It can't move. It never will. And still it howls! Don't you catch on, Tuffy?" he searched my eyes, his own sparkling excitedly. "It's a trick of some kind. Some one around here wants some one else to *think* that the stone dog comes to life and howls. But what we heard was an artificial howl. That's why it sounded so funny to you. No wonder we were scared! And I'm wondering now if the trickster isn't the queer-acting butter-maker himself. We know that he comes here at night. Harry said so. But what the man's object can be, and how he makes that unearthly noise, is a riddle to me."

Common sense told me that Cobby had the right dope. Yet I was peculiarly disappointed. The adventure sort of lost its thrill now. I suppose, though, that's the way it is with ghosts. You think you're messing around with a real ghost. But in the end you learn that some one has been putting on a clever program.

Continuing their determined search for the ham thief, the Scouts dropped their clubs, and headed for the cabin, when Al caught sight of the butter-maker coming up the hill.

"But why do you want us to hide from him?" Short Change held back, when urged to get into the cabin out of sight.

"Because he does queer things up here," was Al's rather vague explanation. "And if he caught sight of us he might chase us out of here."

"But it isn't his cabin," urged Short Change.

"Oh," Al gave the smaller one an impatient shove, "do as I tell you and dry up."

Then, as the butter-maker entered the clearing, a gaunt, wild-looking creature with tousled hair and burning, haunted eyes, the cabin became a well of silence. Nor did the panting, frantic-acting newcomer seem to realize that a dozen pairs of startled eyes were watching him as he stopped beside the stone dog and touched it with trembling fingers.

There was another long, agonizing howl.

"How did he do it?" says Cobby, more mystified than ever.

"He didn't," says I, in a changed voice, as I read the truth of the situation in the man's anguished face. "He's as dumb about that howling as we are."

Nor did Cobby argue the matter with me, or in any way attempt to defend his earlier theory. For he saw that I was right. And then, convinced that the unbalanced butter-maker actually thought at times that the stone dog was alive, which explained his fear of it, as shown by the guarded manner in which he had touched it, we jointly held our breath as the gaunt object of our attention darted from the clearing and ran frantically down the hill, seemingly afraid that the howling dog would momentarily sink its front teeth into his flying heels.

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked!" cried Cobby, searching my face, his own a complete blank. "And I thought we had the mystery all solved!" Then he sort of pulled himself together. "As the saying is," his natural humor asserted itself, "we're getting no place fast."

Cobby led me to a hollow tree.

CHAPTER XIV

COBBY'S AMAZING DISCOVERY

HERE Harry himself came into sight, capless and out of breath. But instead of stopping in the clearing, with its scattered statues and general air of mystery, he ran directly to the cabin.

"Don't be scared, fellows," he cried, as

he tumbled in on the white-faced Scouts. "It's only me."

"What's the matter?" cried Joe, as he got a better look at the panting newcomer.

"Pa's done for, I guess," Harry's eyes showed the agony that he felt. "He tripped at the foot of the hill and hurt himself. There's blood on his head. I tried to get him into the house. But he was too much for me."

"We'll help you," Joe offered quickly. "And we've got a first-aid kit, too, if Rubber Gullet hasn't made a meal of it."

"Huh!" bridled the mentioned Scout. "What do you take me for, anyway?—a goat?"

"Haw! haw! haw!" bellowed Short Change, favored by a sudden burst of intelligence. "I know what you are."

"Tell us," grinned Joe, as he started for the door.

"A jassack."

Which evidently was a joke, for the Scouts all laughed with the exception of Rubber Gullet, who acted as though he wanted to take Short Change outside and punch his nose in seventeen places.

Then, as they trailed out of the cabin, Short Change, as usual, bringing up the rear, Cobby and I took after them.

"What in heck is a jassack?" says I curiously.

"Hee-haw! Hee-haw!" demonstrated Cobby.

And then did *I* ever feel foolish!

Tagging the boys down the hill we watched them lift the injured butter-maker and carry him into the creamery, where they got busy on him with their first-aid kit, reminding us of the other similar kit that had served us so splendidly in the forest. Then one of the older Scouts lit out for town to get a doctor, who, when he arrived on the scene an hour later, scoffed at the idea that the stone dog had actually howled.

"But we heard it," declared Joe, whose face still showed the effects of his recent scare.

"I'll grant," says Dr. Markley, "that you heard something. And very probably Mr. Parker thought that it was the stone dog. For I've been told that he was on the verge of a mental collapse. But I'm far too practical-minded myself to take stock in any such fanciful theories as that."

"Earlier in the evening," informed Joe, "we heard another dog. But the howls were entirely different."

"And were you fortunate enough to catch sight of the initial howler?" came the interested inquiry.

"I don't know what you call fortunate," put in Rubber Gullet, with a sort of rueful look. "But the blamed thing tried to make a pancake of my face, if that answers your question. And, even worse, it stole our boiled ham."

Dr. Markley gave an understanding smile.

"Notwithstanding the fact," says he, "that I get a great deal of enjoyment out of my work, I've always had the secret feeling that I was cut out for a detective. So, when I have finished here, suppose we take a trip to the top of the hill? We may learn that the solution of the mystery is a far simpler matter than we imagine."

Naturally impatient, and satisfied that he had learned all that he could at the creamery, Cobby had gone back to the moonlit art gallery to put on a little investigation party of his own. I met him when I followed the others up the hill,

Harry and Al having volunteered to take care of the still unconscious patient, whose condition, it seems, was not particularly serious.

As soon as I got a look at Cobby's telltale brown eyes, so much like my own, I knew that something out of the ordinary had happened.

"No," he told me, when I began shoving questions at him, "I haven't solved the mystery. But I think it *will* be solved in a jiffy," he waggled, "when we learn what old Popover was doing here to-night."

"Popover?" I stared. "Was *he* here?"

"Nothing else but," came the confident assertion. "And the wonder is to me that we didn't smell him."

Then, cutting to the right, the others having gone straight up the hill, Cobby took me to a hollow tree, in which the lightning, or some woodcutter, had made a door-like opening.

"Now," I was asked, "can you smell anything?"

I sniffed.

"It's Popover, all right," I agreed.

Cobby gave a satisfied nod.

"The tree is full of wires," he told me.

"There's another wire leading to the hilltop. Electrical stuff, I guess. And when I pawed around among the dead leaves in the bottom of the tree I uncovered that thing," he pointed.

"What is it?" I inquired, staring at the indicated box-like object

"A small talking machine."

A small talking machine!

"Cobby," says I, as my wits jumped into high gear, "could old Popover stand here in the tree with the talking machine and make it sound near the stone dog?"

"I think so," came the reflective reply. "For you know what that radio man did to Mrs. Bean's old talking machine. She plays it in one corner of the parlor, near the place where she rocked on Mr. Bean's false teeth, and the sound comes through a loud speaker under her brother's picture on the other side of the room."

"Then," says I, with a sort of snappy swing to my voice, satisfied now that there was a loud speaker hidden in the trees at the top of the hill, "we've solved the mystery. Where old popcorn-popper got it I can't imagine. But evidently he has a talking-machine record that

howls. And that's what he's been playing here night after night, to make the superstitious creamery man think that the cemetery was haunted, wanting, of course, to drive the frightened man away from here and thus get his property for a song."

"Boy," Cobby gave me a look that made me feel good, "there's nothing the matter with *your* brain-box. A four-legged Sherlock Holmes! That's what you are, Tuffy, and I don't mean maybe."

"Then you're convinced," says I, "that I'm right?"

"Absolutely," says he, with an emphatic nod. "Not that you've explained everything," he added. "But you've certainly made a clear case against old popcorn-popper."

"How are we going to expose him?" says I, my voice betraying the eagerness that I felt.

"We can never do that ourselves," says Cobby, an unusual sadness accompanying his words. "For we're nothing but a pair of dogs. And while dogs can talk with others of their kind, they can't similarly talk to people. The best we can do is to bring Dr. Markley here,

letting him figure things out for himself. And if he seems unable to identify the talking machine, lacking our keen sense of smell, we'll lead him to the right house, after which, I hope, old Popover will get a free ride to jail."

Which, I agreed, with mounting indignation, was the right place for men of his stamp, contemptible hypocrite that he was, and willing even to drive a man crazy to gain his own selfish miserly ends. Plainly the only God that *he* worshiped was money, though he tried to let on to the neighbors that he was a good church member. It was well, I told myself, thinking of the millions of good church-going people in the world, that he was an exception.

To do our stuff we had to show ourselves at the top of the hill. And did the Scouts ever separate themselves from an angry cry when they caught sight of us! But they quickly forgave us when we lugged the boiled ham out of the bushes and dropped it sort of penitent-like at their feet. It wasn't hurt any, as Rubber Gullet quickly found out. And how great was his joy as he disappeared into the cabin to make himself a sandwich! Convinced now that we

were a pair of smart dogs, with a purpose, the Scouts finally followed us to the hollow tree, the contents of which filled them with amazement. But Dr. Markley, clever man that he was, soon got the drift of things. And best of all, having found a loud speaker near the stone dog, just as I had suspected, he picked up a business letter in the tree, in which communication the oil company of which old Popover was a stockholder had instructed the local member to pay twenty thousand dollars for the idle creamery. So you can see what the old skinflint's scheme was. He intended to buy the creamery for a song, and then resell it to his own company at a tremendous personal profit.

Oh, he was an old stinker, all right. He even had Bella and her gang outclassed. And while I don't know all the particulars, I have a hunch that there was a hot time in his home when Dr. Markley and the grim-faced sheriff swooped down on him with the undisputable evidence of his guilt.

Mrs. Popover, I was told, cried all over the sun parlor. For she was a good woman at heart, even though she did have a voice like an

old cracked bell and an over-supply of gab. Threatening to leave home, she finally made up with the old buzzard, who, having escaped a jail sentence, was only too glad to pay the creamery man the twenty thousand dollars due him and thus hush the matter up.

And now before I get back to the buried nuggets, I'll write down Mr. Parker's strange story, thus clearing up certain points that may seem a bit vague to you. Cobby and I heard the story the night that the quieted invalid dished it out to Dr. Markley and two interested neighbors. And having read it you'll see what a great relief it was to the persecuted creamery man to learn the truth about the supposed midnight howler.

The old haunted look had vanished from his face.

CHAPTER XV

MR. PARKER'S STRANGE STORY

COBBY was right. He and I were big enough now to paddle our own canoes, as the saying is. My ma admitted it. And much less than punishing us for disobeying her, she told us feelingly, when we brought back to her the news

of old Popover's exposure, that she was proud of us.

Yet it distressed her to give us up. I could see that. Her voice trembled. And there were tears in her big brown eyes. Nor am I ashamed to admit that there were tears in my own eyes, too.

"From now on," says she, getting her voice under control, "you can come and go as you please. For you've proved to me that you are both honorable and courageous. Better pups I never raised. And I expect big things from you in future years. You might even become life-savers, like the heroic Saint Bernard dogs in the Alps, or circus performers. There's no telling what lies ahead of you. We all have our separate lives to live. So live yours purposefully and honorably. You know that I love you. I'll always love you. And should we become separated in later years, as so frequently happens in the lives of dogs, I hope you won't forget me and your early teachings."

Good old ma! She didn't always practice what she preached, as I have mentioned. But she knew what was right and had instructed

us accordingly. As though I *would* ever forget her! But when I tried to snuggle up to her she laughingly pushed me aside, telling me that she had buried a choice bone for me beside the bath-tub watering trough in the barnyard. But she might just as well have parked the bone on some distant planet for all the good I got out of it. For what do you know if Cobby didn't snitch the titbit on me and eat it! Another Rubber Gullet! That's what *he* was, all right, as I told him, with considerable vigor, when I found him sitting contented-like in the empty hole.

"Tut! Tut!" says he, brazenly picking his teeth in front of me. "That's no way for you to talk to an ambitious young life-saver. Many a weary mountain traveler," he recited, with elaborate gestures, "has fallen by the wayside. And how am I to dig fallen travelers out of snow-banks, and thus get my name in the hero column, if I don't do a little practicing?"

The big monkey!

But I got even with him. Turning quickly, I scratched about a peck of dirt in his face, letting on that *I* was a life-saver, too. Then, as

I came to an old rusty sardine can, I socked that at him.

"Look, Cobby!" I yipped, digging more furiously than ever. "I've just found another fallen traveler. Come and help me pull him out of the hole."

"Yah," came the grumpy reply, as the speaker clawed at his eyes, "and you'll find your nose sticking through a crack in the back of your head, too, if I take a poke at you."

"Speaking of noses," says I, laying a crafty trap for him, "can you breathe through yours?"

"Sure thing," says he innocently, as he further excavated his eyeballs.

"Then why don't you do it," says I pleasantly, "and give your mouth a rest?"

Which almost floored him.

"Tuffy," says he, sort of squinting at me narrow-eyed-like, "I used to think that you were dumb. But now I think you're dumber."

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" says I, using some of his old stuff. "You can't insult me. For I've been insulted by people with brains."

"Yah," was his quick come-back, "and you better save your breath to cool your soup, too."

After which we went over to the barn and practiced turning flip-flops on the hay. For it wasn't improbable, we agreed, that we'd have to get a job with Mr. Ringling's circus while we were completing our life-saving course.

"I'm hoping, though," says Cobby, as we further discussed our possible circus career, the idea having been put into our heads by our ma, "that we won't have to do any performing in China. For that's a bad place for dogs."

"Why so?" says I, as I lay down to rest, little dreaming how soon I was to become a part of a queer one-ring circus.

"Outside of missionaries and codfish," says Cobby, giving himself a learned air, "there's nothing that a hungry Chinaman likes any better than a nice juicy pup roast."

"Cooked tail and all, I suppose," says I, wondering how much of his story was true.

"Oh, sure," says he quickly, with a vigorous nod. "The tail is considered the best part of the meal."

"And what becomes of the eyeballs?" says I, with a yawn.

"Well," says he, his own eyes twinkling

roguishly, proof in itself that he was making up stuff now, "that all depends. If there's children in the family the meal usually ends in a marble game. But if they run short of fruit they substitute the eyeballs for grapes."

"Oof!" says I, as something turned a handspring in my stomach.

Cobby got his eyes on a passing flivver.

"Who was it?" says I quickly.

"Old Popover, I guess."

"Boy," I laughed, "I can imagine how he'd love to flatten us out with that old gas-chewer of his."

"Yah," says Cobby, kind of hard-like, "and I can imagine, too, what my ma and pa would do to the seat of his pants if he tried it."

"I wonder what the neighbors think of him?" says I curiously.

"Well," says Cobby, "from the few expressions that I've heard I don't think the people around here would weep their eyes out if he packed up and moved to California, as he talks of doing."

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," says I, which was an old saying of Mrs. Bean's.

"He still would have his old friends, and be welcome in their homes, if he had done what was right," says Cobby thoughtfully. "So he has nobody to blame for the situation but himself."

"Which proves," says I, as I further considered the miser's unhappy case, "that my ma knew what she was talking about when she told us that wrongdoers always get their just pay."

"Every time," waggled Cobby. "And hereafter," he took the lesson to heart, "I'm going to think twice before I go messing other people's boiled hams around. For I want to live a long and honorable life, just as my ma said."

"You and me both," says I feelingly.

Old Popover knew, all right, whose dogs it was that had uncovered the telltale talking machine in the hollow tree. That's why he now had it in for us. And if we hadn't known about the buried nuggets we probably would have been worried. For nothing would have pleased the revengeful old mortgage-holder any better than to shove our dear master and mistress out of their home.

But *we* had the winning trick up our sleeve,

so to speak. And how great would be Mr. and Mrs. Bean's joy when we saved the day for them. It was a pleasing thing to look forward to.

A different boy now, Harry took us home with him that night, seemingly unable to do enough for us. And how I enjoyed his carefree happy whistle as he stepped it off straight-shouldered down the country road, Cobby and I tagging at his heels. It was nice to know that we had brought this new happiness into his life. As for Mr. Parker, we saw right off, as soon as we entered the house, that he was a changed man. The old haunted look had vanished from his wrinkled face. The eyes were quiet now. The hitherto tortured mind was at peace.

"Here they are, pa," Harry's voice showed the happiness that he felt, as the three of us tumbled into the dingy room where the invalid sat propped up in bed.

"Um . . ." the speaker's kindly eyes looked us over. "So you're the dogs, huh, who found that talking machine in the hollow tree?"

We couldn't answer him. For dogs can't speak to people. But we showed plainly

enough by our frisky actions that we understood what he was talking about.

A neighbor woman had volunteered to take care of the house until Harry was relieved at the farm. And could she make swell gravy! Cobby and I swigged it down till it oozed out of our eyes. We had cake, too, only the housekeeper didn't know about that, Harry having slipped it to us on the sly.

Dr. Markley came in at the conclusion of the evening meal. And then, when the supper dishes had been washed and put away, the woman and her husband became a part of the small expectant group in the sick chamber, where the strengthened invalid told his story.

"I was born and raised in Monroe, Wisconsin," the story had its simple beginning, the man picking his words in a slow quiet way. "My father was a cheese-maker and from him my twin brother and I learned the creamery business. But my heart was set on being a doctor. And winning my father's consent to the ambitious plan I completed a medical course in the state university, later locating in Morristown, Kentucky, where for several years I prac-

ticed successfully. But many of my patients were poor people, who could ill afford to pay doctor bills, so I added little to my estate.

"It was in Morristown that I met and married Harry's mother, a beautiful, accomplished Kentucky girl. The later entrance of our son into the world was the one thing needed to complete our nuptial happiness. And then—oh, the bitter tragedy of it!—my beloved wife suddenly sickened and died. It seemed to me at first that I would go mad, so overwhelming was my grief. And as I look back now I cannot doubt that my brain was peculiarly affected. For later I became the unhappy victim of strange delusions and unnerving hallucinations. Knowing that my practice had netted me scarcely more than a living, my married sister, in Monroe, generously offered to take Harry into her home, which, of course, materially lightened my financial burden, as I was relieved of the expense of his care. Nor can I say truthfully that the separation from my child brought any regret. For the baby face was a constant reminder to me of the beloved absent mother. Harry lived with my sister for nearly ten years.

Then, about four years ago, he came here. I was a butter-maker then, having given up my medical practice. I'll tell you in a few moments *why* I gave it up.

"My wife had helped me take care of the office records, enjoying the added contact that this brought about between us. But the important records became a mess after her death. I realized, though, that I couldn't go on like this. I needed a steady hand and a steady brain. Otherwise I might be called to account for some later grave error. So one stormy September night I set to work on the scattered records. I still remember how the rain beat incessantly against the closed office windows, reminding me strangely of tapping ghostly fingers—the beginning of that long chain of unnerving delusions and hallucinations! Except for the monotonous drumming on the windows, and an occasional eerie shriek of the wind, I seemed to be shut in by a suffocating silence. An experienced psychologist undoubtedly would have interpreted this as a premonition. I only knew that I was strangely uneasy.

"I had heard no sound in the outside cor-

ridor, the other tenants of the office building having long since sought their beds. Nor had I heard my office door open and close. Yet suddenly I felt that eyes were watching me. And when I turned quickly, there, within four feet of me, stood a strange man of towering stature.

" 'Please do not be frightened,' he spoke to me in what was intended to be a reassuring tone of voice, when I sprang white-lipped and choking to my feet. 'I'll grant that I came in quietly. But quietness is a characteristic of mine. No,' he sought to relieve the tense situation with a laugh, which fell mirthlessly on my ears, 'I am not a ghost. See!' he extended his right hand, the fingers of which I noticed vaguely were long and well-formed, suggesting that he lived a life of ease. 'It is flesh and bone the same as yours.'

" 'Who are you,' I finally managed to inquire, as a distant resonant tower clock struck twice, thus reminding me of the approaching daybreak, 'and what do you want?'

" 'My name is Alexander Morton,' he informed, speaking the name with a peculiar noticeable pride. 'But unless you have traveled

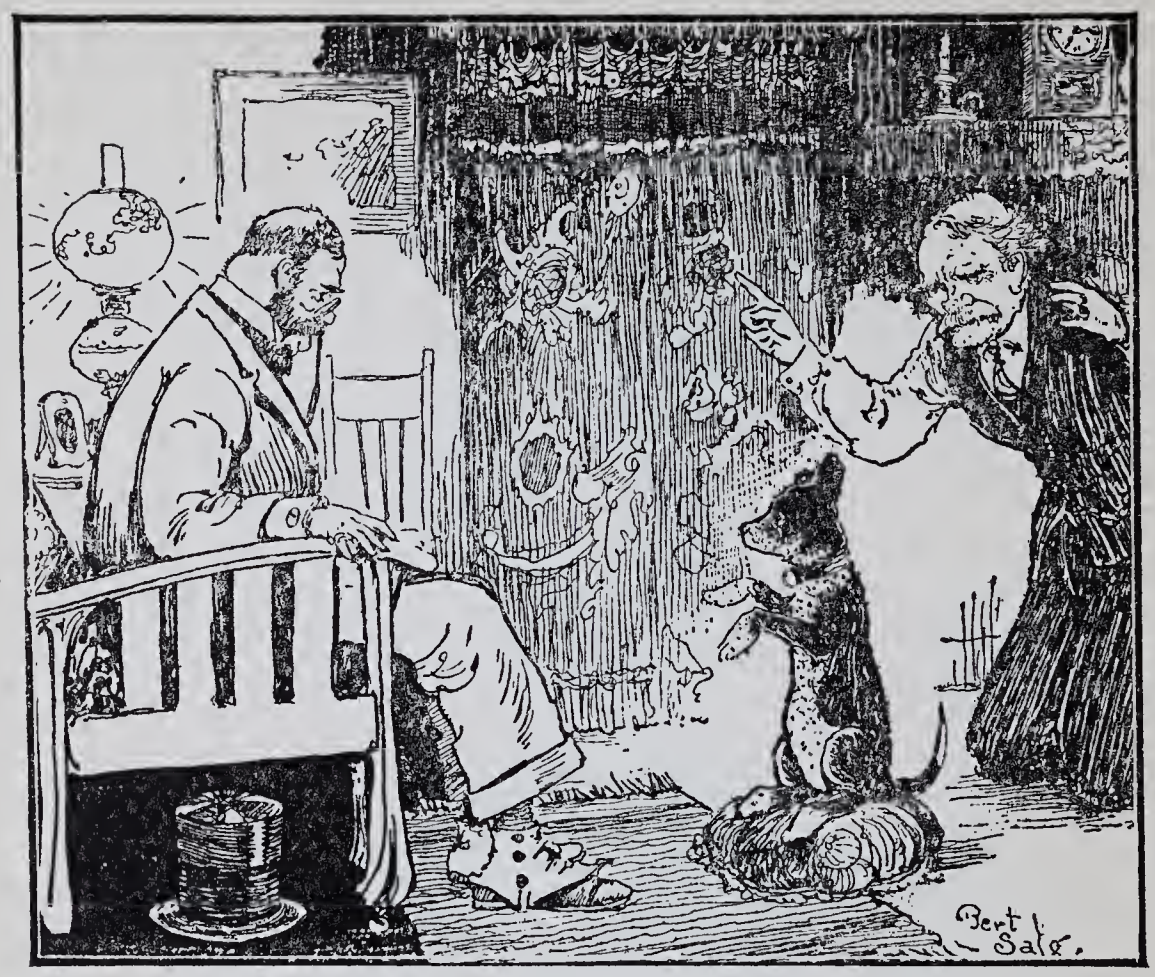
deeply into the mountains to the south of here,' he added, 'that name will mean nothing to you. I came here in a powerful motor car that now waits without the lower door. And if you will accompany me to-night to a place many miles from here, where your services are urgently needed, you are at liberty to name your own terms.'

"I thought, of course, as any experienced physician would, that he wanted me to perform some kind of an illegal operation or make some illicit use of my acquired talents. But he assured me, with visible emotion, that this was not the case. Yet it was necessary, he added, in the same constrained tone of voice, offering no particulars of the case, for me to accompany him blindfolded.

"As I have mentioned, I was short of money, the expenses of my wife's brief illness and later burial having drawn heavily on my savings. This personal condition, coupled with a definite growing curiosity, prompted me to accept the man's offer. Nor did I, as I later drove away blindfolded in my strange client's huge car, having provided myself with an extra case of

surgical instruments, suspect that I was dealing with a peculiar madman."

Here the invalid paused in his story, asking for a glass of water. Nor did the spellbound listeners utter a single word.



I was proud of the tricks Mr. Bean had taught me.

CHAPTER XVI

AN EMERGENCY CALL

"WE drove for hours," Mr. Parker then resumed his story. "Not a word passed between us, my strange client giving the speeding car his complete attention. I was blindfolded, as I say. Yet I could tell when day broke. We

were now in the mountains. And while I had no definite knowledge of my surroundings, never having had occasion to come this way before, I had the vague feeling that it was from these richly-stocked hills that the state obtained a large portion of its needed coal supply. I later proved the accuracy of this surmise, learning that Morton's coal holdings, in the heart of the mountains, where he had built himself a magnificent home, had made him rich beyond the dreams of most men.

" 'This is my home, Dr. Parker,' he told me, when we alighted at the doorway of the elaborate dwelling, the cloth having been removed from my eyes. Then he led me into a mammoth hall, where I first saw those hideous statues! Yes, I mean the statues now standing on the hill. They were brought here later, at which time the statue of the dog was added to the sinister group. 'And these,' my guide called attention ot the statues that paralleled our course through the big hall, 'are my relatives. The ladies in the long gowns are my sisters. The men are my brothers. The little girls are my cousins. All have gone before me, but I

have immortalized them in stone. Just as I knew them in life, there they stand, ready to battle against eternity. If you are interested in sculpture, doctor, I would be pleased to show you a statue that I am having made of myself and a favorite mount. Nor does that dual statue conclude the group,' he spoke with noticeable sadness in his voice. 'There is to be one more.' And then he led me into a room the magnificent furnishings and decorations of which surpassed anything that I had ever dreamed of. I could imagine as I stood there, more amazed than ever by the course that the strange adventure was taking, that I had been magically transported to the sumptuous palace of some oriental potentate. And then my attention was drawn to a massive adorned couch on which lay a huge dog of unknown breed, which showed plainly enough by its actions that it was suffering from some malignant disease.

"And I had been brought all this distance to administer to an ailing dog! Small wonder that I was both offended and irritated.

"'I am not a veterinarian,' I cried. And then, as I got a look at the man's bottomless

eyes, I stopped short. For I saw that I was dealing with a lunatic. Not the kind that we usually find in private and public institutions. But one who possessed unusual cunning, and whose vast wealth enabled him to gratify his idiotic whims. This explained why he had driven so many miles for a physician, a thing that had puzzled me greatly. For I laid no claim to any specialized talents. As for the blindfold, that, I concluded, was just an invention of his unbalanced mind.

"The dog's history didn't interest me at the moment, though I have wondered since why he gave it so much attention. He seemed actually to worship it, as though it was some kind of a god. And I had the conviction that dire things were liable to happen to me if I further refused to administer to its needs.

"I was frightened. Already upset by my wife's untimely death, I trembled like a leaf. Those weird statues, too, had affected me strangely. It was as though the owner of the house had assembled his whole family here to see that I performed my work satisfactorily.

"Then, as the dog groaned, I collected my-

self as best I could and got out my medicine case. The patient was in no particular danger, I spoke glibly, determined to make my escape from the sinister house at the first opportunity. It was merely a case of indigestion, I added. Nor had I the slightest idea what was the matter with the animal, to whom I later administered what I thought was a harmless capsule. But the thing I had feared now happened! I confused the drugs that I handled! And shortly I observed that the dog was dying. Much less than having cured it I had killed it.

"I learned later on that there were servants in the house. But they were a queer lot. Paid well, they stoically performed their apportioned tasks and asked no questions. Their odd master's business was none of their business. And so that night they discreetly kept out of sight.

"Yet, had I known that they were there, in distant sleeping quarters, I doubt if I would have screamed for help. I would have expected them to obey their deranged master's orders. What I did, instead of screaming, was to watch my chance, and when the man's back was turned, I struck him over the head with my

heavy, metal-trimmed medicine case. He sank like a log, the dog at the same moment giving a final gasp. To escape from the house I had to pass those fearful accusing statues—you can see how strangely they affected me, even then!—which was the worst ordeal of all. But I finally found myself in the outer air, with the somber mountains all around me, out of which I completed my escape in the costly motor car, which I later abandoned on the edge of a small town.

"Nor did I ever return to Morristown. For I knew the unforgiving owner of the dog, with his crafty steps, would follow me and make me the target of his unbalanced vengeance. I could have gone to the authorities, of course. But somehow I wanted to get away. I had lost my nerve. And so, after learning some facts about the coal baron, whose eccentricities were the talk of the country, I began a roving life which continued until Harry was ten years old. My brother was then the owner of this creamery. Told that his health was failing, I came here to see him, later taking over the business at his death. Then, having decided to forever give up the practice of medicine, and resuming the

trade that my father had taught me, I sent for Harry, greatly enjoying his society at first, but wishing, as my mind began to play tricks on me, that I had left him in my sister's capable hands. And that he endured the life here, as I more and more became a victim to my hallucinations, instead of returning to the better home that he had known in Monroe, speaks well for his nobility of character. I even beat him. But that is all past now. He has forgiven me. And many happy days lie ahead of us. Having sold the creamery, as you know, the money that I received has been put aside to take care of us when we move to Rockdale."

Pausing, the butter-maker then went back to the main theme of his story.

"Shortly after Harry arrived here I had occasion to go to Milwaukee on business, where I met Alexander Morton face to face. Having aged greatly during the past few years he pretended not to recognize me. But later he erected those grim statues near his birthplace at the top of the hill, which convinced me that he had secretly followed me home. For I saw in the statues, particularly the statue of the dog itself,

a stone counterpart of the animal that *I* had killed, a malevolent scheme to haunt me and thus repay me for my unhappy blunder. Oh, I know it sounds silly! And I'm glad to say that I first experienced no fear of the statues, which night and day looked down at me from the hilltop. Then, as you know, Morton died. His body was brought here and the final statue erected. That, too, according to orders that he had given during his lifetime, was faced in the same directon. People wondered at it. And I wondered at it, too. Maybe I was wrong, I told myself sensibly. There might be some other meaning attached to the uniform position of the statues. I pored over the mystery, spending much time at the top of the hill. And then the deadening conviction settled over me that the statues *had* been placed there to haunt me.

"That is when my mind went back on me. I neglected my business. In time I had to close the creamery. Subject to unreasonable fits of anger, I lost my friends. Only my own son stuck by me. Then one day I experienced a ray of hope when Popover came to me, wanting to buy the creamery. Here was my chance to

sell out and leave the neighborhood. But I was offered a mere pittance for my inherited property. And thus I stayed on.

"Popover met me one night in the cemetery. And I foolishly told him that I was afraid of the stone dog. It was haunting me, I said. And that is when the scheme was born in his tricky mind to drive me out of here. I first heard the howling dog one night last winter. But when I reached the cemetery there the dog stood as lifeless as ever. At times I begged Morton on bended knees to turn his face away and thus relieve my mental misery. Sometimes the dog would howl several nights in succession. Then it would be silent for weeks at a time, depending, as I see it now, on Popover's leisure.

"But all that has come to an end, thanks to these fine courageous dogs. I have a new life ahead of me. The old absurd fears have completely passed away."

And there the story came to an end.

Old popcorn-popper came in for a good razzing in the brief conversation that followed.

"I hope," says the woman, giving her head

a sharp toss, "that he *does* move to California—the unprincipled old buzzard!"

"It's beyond me," Dr. Markley spoke thoughtfully, "how a man could do such a thing, realizing that another's mentality was at stake. But the greed for money, I guess, in an ingrown case like this, is a hard thing to control."

There was more talk between the two men when they got outside.

"Do you suppose," says the farmer, glancing up the hill, "that Morton actually put the statues there to haunt Parker?"

"No," came the quick positive reply. "That all grew up in Parker's imagination. For I happen to know that Morton completely lost his memory during the closing years of his unhappy life."

And then I had a nice fat laugh as I thought of Cobby's "murder" theory. That sure was rich, all right.

When it came time to go to bed Harry spread a blanket for us on the floor. But no sooner had I closed my eyes, it seemed, than I heard my ma barking outside.

"What's the matter?" was Cobby's sleepy inquiry, as I grabbed him by the tail.

"Get up quick!" says I, sort of panting-like. "Something's happened at the farmhouse. For my ma's outside barking her head off."

Harry scolded us when we gave his covers a tug. Then, getting wise to what we wanted, he got up and let us out.

"It's old Popover," my ma told us quickly, as we stood beside her in the moonlight. "He's been over to our house raising cain. And Mr. and Mrs. Bean, who got home about two hours ago, are crying their eyes out. They think they're going to lose the farm, old Popover having threatened to foreclose the mortgage on them to thus pay them back for what you dogs did to him."

And then, as we lit out for home, where the rest of the family was waiting for Cobby and me to lead them to the buried fortune in the forest, I learned other things that were to have an important bearing on my later life.

An old friend of Mr. Bean's had just arrived at the farmhouse, my ma said, as we legged it down the country road. And then she laughed

as she told me how the stranger had driven into the yard with several dogs in the back part of his old car.

"Honest, Tuffy, I never saw such goofy-looking dogs in all my life. But you should see them perform! They're almost human."

"Can they beat me?" says I, kind of envious-like, recalling the tricks that Mr. Bean had taught me.

My ma was peculiarly silent.

"What's the matter?" says I quickly, alarmed by her manner.

"If you must know the truth," says she, "Mr. Ebenezer Tiffet is a dog showman. And having heard about you through Mr. Bean, he wants to buy you."

That gave me a queer feeling. It was nice to know that I had a value. Yet I didn't like the idea of my master selling me.

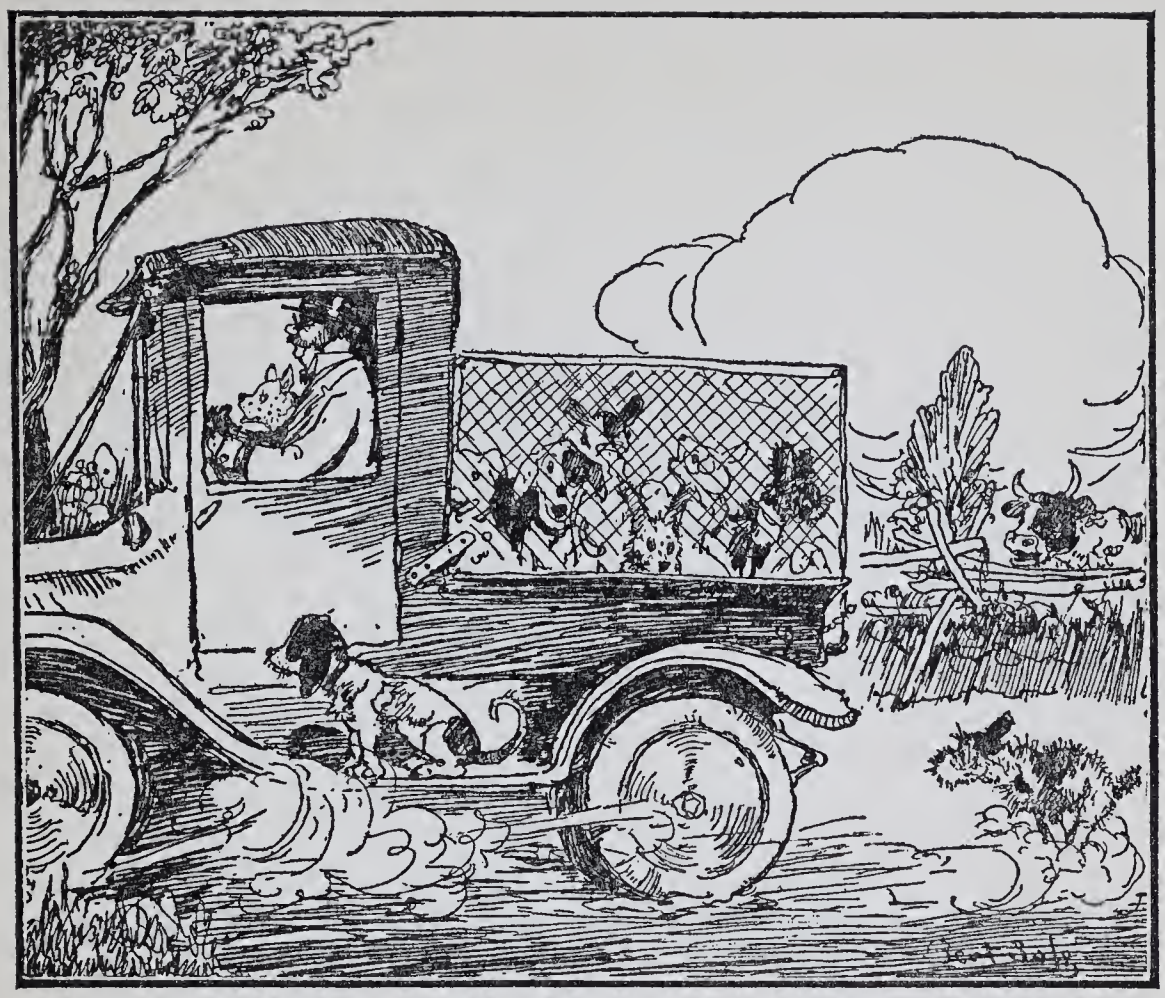
"How much was Mr. Bean offered?" says I quietly.

"Fifty dollars," says my ma.

"And what did he say?" I inquired anxiously.

"Well, he hasn't said 'no.' For, with the mortgage hanging fire, fifty dollars sounds like

a lot of money to him." Then my ma laughed in her jolly way. "But you needn't worry, Tuffy. Much less than wanting to sell you, he'll put you in a glass cage and feed you canary hearts when he learns how you and Cobby saved the day for him."



The showman and his goofy looking dogs drove away.

CHAPTER XVII

MY NEW MASTER

COBBY kind of elevated his pug nose when he heard about Mr. Tiffet's offer.

"Humph!" the superior grunt was pushed at me. "If you're worth fifty dollars I'd hate to think what I'm worth."

But I didn't talk back to him. For I was in too much of a hurry to get home.

Disturbed by old popcorn-popper's earlier visit, and having much to talk over with his old friend, Mr. Bean was still sitting up, as I saw when we tumbled into the farmyard, having taken a short-cut through the orchard.

"I swan!" came the pleased exclamation, when I appeared in the puddle of light outside the kitchen door. "Here's Tuffy now—the little rascal!"

And holding the door open for me, Mr. Bean first patted me on the head, telling me in that loving way of his how glad he was to see me again, after which he made me do my tricks.

"Now," came the final command, "go over an' shake hands with Mr. Ebenezer Tiffet, an ol' friend of mine who makes a livin' showin' off dogs like you."

Mr. Tiffet, I saw then, as I obediently held out my paw, having walked up to him on my hind legs, was a tall, hungry-looking man with shaggy gray hair and faded blue eyes. As my ma had told me, he had the smell of a dozen dogs on his shabby clothes. I could see, all right,

as he kind of squinted at me with narrowed eyes, that he knew a lot about dogs. And then, as I completed my tricks, his eyes popped open, as though he had just awakened. But that was just a trick of his, as I learned later on. He would act as though he was half asleep. And all the time his brain was skidding around like a dizzy pollywog. It was only when he came to a decision that he made full use of his eyes. A queer old man, all right. And likable, too.

"Kind-a amateurish," he cackled in his shrill-voiced way, referring to my tricks. "But I've made star purformers out of dogs that knew a blamed sight less. So, if you want to let him go, Henry, that offer of mine still stands."

Mr. Bean looked troubled.

"As I told you, Ebenezer, I'm in a tight place right now. An' I *could* use fifty dollars to mighty good advantage. But I hate to sell my own dog."

"Wa-al," shrugged the lanky visitor, as he took out his false teeth and polished them with his handkerchief, "you know best. Sartinly, he'd never be misused if I *did* git him."

"I was a fool," Mr. Bean accompanied the

more vigorous words with a flash of his eyes, "to borrow money from Popover in the first place. Fur I knew his reputation. But havin' neighbored with him so long I thought he'd let the principal ride if I paid the interest. Old friendships mean nothin' to him, though, as I found out to-night. Either I've got to pay up, he says, or he's goin' to put us out of here."

The visitor seemed to be half asleep again.

"Five hundred dollars, heh?" he sort of drawled.

"That's the amount," nodded Mr. Bean, looking more discouraged-like than ever.

"Got anything saved up?"

"No," the word was spoken shortly.

"Um. . . . Never paid more'n fifty dollars fur a dog in all my life. In fact, I git most of my purformers fur nothin', as you could easily tell by lookin' at 'em. Mongrels they be, fur the most part. But I'm willin' to pay a good price fur an exceptional dog. So, if you'll knock Tuffy down to me, an' be willin' to call it a deal, I'll make it an even hundred dollars."

A hundred dollars! For *me,* mind you! No wonder that Cobby, who was peeking in the

door kind of envious-like, fainted dead away.

But Mr. Bean shook his head. And he seemed kind of offended now. As though he realized that the visitor, out of friendship, had offered a great deal more for me than I was worth.

Then the men lapsed into silence when Mrs. Bean bustled into the room.

"Laws-a-me, pa!" she spoke in her characteristic way. "You ought to see what the mice did to the soles of your bedroom slippers. And one of the pesky critters actually ate the artificial plum off my winter hat. All on account of a green-apple pie, too! For if sister Ella, now as well as ever, hadn't made a pig of herself, as usual, we never would have been called away from here, thus allowing the mice free run of the premises. Still, that dress that she gave me is worth something. And if I can make it over as she says, no one around here will ever know that she sat down in a dish of jello the time she got up the surprise party on her second husband."

Then, as the speaker was reminded of the impending mortgage by Mr. Bean's long face,

she sat down and started to weep. Her home wasn't much, she sobbed, looking up at a wooden potato masher on the kitchen wall. But it was the best that she had ever known. And it would break her heart to give it up, even if it did have mouse holes in the closets.

Here my ma gave an impatient bark. So, joining her, we lit out for the forest, my sisters following close on my pa's heels. He and Cobby led the way, and my ma and I brought up the rear. Uncovering the undisturbed nuggets, and loading up (my ma and my pa carried three each and the rest of us two each), we then lit out for home, where we hid the nuggets under the back porch, later piling them, with others that we brought home, in the kitchen doorway. It doesn't take me long to tell about it. But it sure took us a long time to do it. And were we ever tired and leg-weary when the job was done! Yet it was a happy weariness. Loving our dear master and mistress, we were only too glad to thus make ourselves useful to them.

But imagine our unbounded amazement the following morning when Mrs. Bean took her

broom and swept the nuggets off the porch. They were nothing but gilded pebbles, she said, scolding us for having made her extra work. And then, as we stood there in a row, the sickest bunch of dogs that you ever saw in all your born days, Henny Bittle came into sight.

"Why," says he, using his eyes, "these are the same nuggets that disappeared from our treasure cave."

And then he told how he and a gang of farm boys, owning ponies, had dressed up like robbers the preceding Sunday morning, sort of acting out the story of Ali Baba, all of which was recorded with a motion-picture camera owned by the father of one of the boys.

Which explained clearly enough who the man was with the "black box"!

I'll never forget the look that my ma gave me. It wasn't my fault, of course, nor Cobby's either, that the nuggets had turned out to be worthless. But having aroused such big hopes, at a time when money was so urgently needed, my ma found it difficult to forgive me.

Mr. Tiffet left at ten o'clock. He was going to stop overnight in Rockdale, he said, camping

as usual on the edge of town. While at the farm his dogs had slept in a corn crib. But I didn't pay any attention to them. If you must know the truth of the matter I was too dazed and disheartened to notice anything.

But when night came I crawled out of my hiding place, unable to stay away any longer from my beloved master, who, at sight of me on the back porch, let me into the house.

Then Mr. Bittle dropped in.

"I've been over to see Squire Popover," says the kindly helpful neighbor, as he seated himself in the kitchen. "And he tells me now that he'll carry over that mortgage of yours for another year if you'll pay him one hundred dollars on the principal. Can you manage that, Mr. Bean?"

"Why, of course!" Mrs. Bean spoke up. And then she looked at me!

Mr. Bean's trembling hairy hand touched my head.

"I guess, Tuffy," says he sorrowfully, "that I'll have to let you go. Fur ma's happiness comes ahead of everything else. I've watched you grow up. An' I've loved you better every

day that I've knowed you. All the gentlemen in this world hain't walkin' 'round on two legs. Some of them has four legs, Tuffy. An' you're the finest little gentleman of them all. It hurts me to give you up. An' it's goin' to hurt you, too. Fur there hain't a tree nor a bush nor a chick nor nothin' else on this ol' farm that you don't love. You're that kind of a dog. But in times like this, Tuffy, a *gentleman* does what is right an' helpful even if it hurts. An' that's what you're goin' to do. Ebenezer knowed when he left here this mornin' that he'd git you. Not that he needs you so very much—but he's anxious to help me, like the good friend that he is. An' I'm going to let him help me. You'll find him in Rockdale, Tuffy. An' to-morrow I'll be lookin' fur a check from him."

He went outside then, taking me with him. And when the others weren't looking he picked me up and hugged me. I could feel him fingering the brass collar—the collar that *he* had bought for me.

Pretty soon he put me down. And knowing what was expected of me I did it.

. . . . . .

Brave, heroic little Tuffy! Who could blame him, home-loving dog that he was, if he now thought that the happiest part of his life had come to an end? But he was soon to learn that many another merry adventure lay ahead of him. For the world is the same here, there and everywhere. True happiness knows no geographical boundaries. He missed his home, of course. But other exciting interests came into his life. He became a wiser, smarter dog, as you will learn if you turn to the succeeding book of this series, TUFFY BEAN'S ONE-RING CIRCUS.

Here you will find new characters, new scenes, and chapter after chapter of rollicking, skylarking fun. Like children, those mismatched performing dogs played innumerable tricks on one another. And what a gay, happy-go-lucky life they led, shielded by some mysterious old building one night and the gentle guarding stars the next, with little mysteries and shivery experiences cropping up here and there.

And now, may we say a few words about Mr. Edwards' other books for boys? First comes

Jerry Todd. You'll love Jerry, for he's a manly little square-shooter. Assisted by his true-blue pals he solves many amusing mysteries in his home town, starting with the disappearance of a strange "whispering mummy."

Jerry's bosom pal, Poppy Ott, is featured in a series of his own, all good books for boys and girls. Next comes Trigger Berg. And what fun there is for you in Mr. Edwards' jolly Trigger Berg books, for Trigger, who tells the story in diary form, is only nine years old himself.

Then, when you are ready for high school, you'll want to read Mr. Edwards' big-boy books, featuring Andy Blake. Though a man in years, this kindly author is still a boy at heart. It is because he knows boys and girls (and dogs, too!) so well that he can write such corking good books about them.

See the following pages for
"OUR CHATTER-BOX"

OUR CHATTER-BOX

WHEN you have a lot of friends (this is Leo Edwards speaking) you usually receive a lot of letters. And so it is with me. many thousands of boys and girls, liking my books, write to me yearly. Some of these letters are corkers. Wanting to see them published, so that other young readers could enjoy them, I created "Our Chatter-Box," which department is now a feature of all of my books.

Some young readers weren't satisfied with writing letters. They started writing poems, mainly about my books and the characters featured therein. And later I made the announcement that each and every boy or girl, who wrote an accepted poem, would receive a free autographed copy of the particular book in which the poem appeared.

That offer still stands. So, if you'd rather write a poem than a letter, why not get busy and do it before you forget about it? If your poem has any merit at all, I'll surely try to use it. And, of course, I'm still looking for interesting letters.

Remember, you're writing to a friend. And simply because I write books myself, don't get the goofy idea that you've got to make your lines straight. Shucks! I can stand on my head if necessary. If you want to spell "cat" with a "k," that suits me. Or, if you're too small to write, have mother or an older sister or brother write for you.

LETTERS

STARTING with this "Chatter-Box" I'm going to publish the complete addresses of all letter writers. That will give boys and girls a chance to exchange letters. So, if you want to have a letter pal in some other state, pick out a name. I can't promise you that you'll get a reply. But you should, I think, if you make your letter interesting. And who knows but what some of the boys will start writing to some of the girls and later get married!

Hip-hip-hurray! Bring on the wedding bells and grocery bills.

And now let us turn to the first letter written by David J. Stout, 428 W. 10th St., Erie, Pa.

"My chum, John Schultz, and I have bought a telephone pole and are going to carve a totem pole like Red's. Also, having joined the Goldfish Club, my chum and I are going to organize a Local Chapter."

"I have just finished reading 'Jerry Todd, Pirate,'" writes Gerald Dourney, 24 Elizabeth Ave., W. Brighton, L. I., N. Y. "Tell me, are the boys in this story real characters? Are the names of the towns, islands, etc., real? I have enjoyed the Jerry

Todd and Poppy Ott books more than any other books that I have read. They certainly sound as though a boy had written them. I like that easy style. Your books remind me of Mark Twain's, but *I* like yours the best! Also I want to join the Goldfish Club."

Well, Gerald, I can't say that all of the boys in my books are real. Red, Scoop, Peg, Poppy, Al Moore, Slats, Tail Light, and such adult characters as Doc Leland, Cap'n Tinkertop and Bill Hadley are real. Tutter is a real town—I was raised there—but Tutter isn't the town's real name. It's in La Salle county, Illinois. See if you can find it!

"A short time ago," writes W. A. Bours 3rd, 315 Stelle Ave., Plainfield, N. J., "I bought 'Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief.' I liked it so much that I wanted more of your books. But I had no money! Then came a bright idea. I sold some of my old books to a Lending Library, and with the money that I received I bought all of the new books that I wanted. Is the initiation in the back of the 'Purring Egg' book true? The only trouble with your stories is that there aren't enough of them. I'd like a new one each week."

Yes, W. A., the initiation in the "Egg" book is true. Come out to Lake Ripley some time and we'll initiate you.

"Here's a probable name for one of your motor boats at Hi-Lee Cottage," writes Paul Drew, 771 Boulevard, Westfield, N. J. "Call it Hi-Lee-Geered (Highly Geared). When my parents lived in Illinois we used to make Wisconsin our vacation state—and how I miss it! We used to camp at Devil's Lake. Have you ever been there? I enjoy your books immensely. Jerry, Poppy, Red, Peg, Scoop, Tail Light, Slats, Trigger and the rest are great pals of mine."

Sure thing, Paul, I've been to Devil's Lake many times. The Cambridge Scouts camped there this summer and I spent a day with them climbing around the rocks. Remember the Devil's Doorway? Well, three of our Scouts climbed to the top, and I took their picture standing on the top-most balanced rock. About 2,000 people camp there all summer; and the night I was there I appeared on a program, telling the assembled campers about books for boys and girls.

"One time," writes Bob Eckenstein, R. D. 2, Box 628, Phoenix, Arizona, "I got up a swell scheme for making a submarine. I was going to use tongue-and-groove boards; and for air I intended to have ventilators made of two pieces of three-inch pipe, about five feet long, fastened upright in the hull. This would enable me to submerge four and one-half feet, and get plenty of air. The pumps, for operating the two submerging tanks, one in front and one behind, were to be two tire pumps. Other plans called for a steering wheel and a rudder. I even planned to install a small gasoline engine in the hull and pipe the exhaust into the periscope. Alas, though, I never got

rich taking down excursion parties in my 'sub.' For we moved away from the lake shortly after that."

Which reminds me of a contrivance that my own boy made a few weeks ago. He got the notion that he could breathe, from under water, through a rubber hose. So he fixed the upper end of the hose to a float and "submerged." He found, though, that the pressure of the water was so great that he couldn't breathe through the hose.

"Last year," writes Dracos D. Burke, 435 W. Maine St., New Iberia, La., "some friends of mine started a Jupiter Police Club. It stopped when school began, but started again during vacation. In our club house we had a water trap. Forgetting about it, my brother got doused—reminding me of Jerry in his 'Rose-Colored Cat' book."

Also Dracos submitted a poem; but it didn't seem quite good enough. Try again, old pal. And why not change that Police Club of yours into a real, honest-to-goodness Freckled Goldfish Club? I'll gladly help you get organized if you'll write to me about it.

"After reading 'Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem,'" writes Betty Jane Miller, Box 1274, Abilene, Texas, "I tried making a similar totem pole, with the help of a girl friend, Mary Ellen McDanial. We had a lot of fun; but our 'totem pole' was a mess. It looked like a telephone pole after a storm."

"Boy," writes Jack Foster, 144-08 Liberty Ave., Jamaica, N. Y., "your last Jerry Todd book—'Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief'—was a wow. I nearly keeled over when I read the advertisements that Peg set up in type. Now I'm anxiously waiting for 'Jerry Todd, Caveman.' It will be great to hear about Oak Island again, with its rocky ravines and big caves. Whenever I get gloomy I pick up a Jerry Todd and laugh my blues away. There isn't an Ott or a Todd book that I haven't read at least four times. Poor Jerry sure had his hands full with the newspaper job—he got blamed for everything. Bert Salg certainly deserves a lot of credit for his wonderful drawings."

"Last summer," writes Robert Broberg, 3544 W. 65 Place, Chicago, Ill., "my parents and I took a trip up to Minnesota. On the way we passed through Cambridge, Wisconsin, where you live. For about seventy miles I had been counting on seeing you. And then my pa told me he didn't have time to stop! Gr-r-r-r! All of the boys in our block are Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott and Trigger Berg fans. To-day I walked forty-two blocks (more or less) to buy 'Editor-in-Grief.' You said one time in a 'Chatter-Box' that you liked thick kids. Well, that's me!"

Too bad, Bob, that your dad was in such a hurry when he got to Cambridge. A great many boys and girls, passing through these parts, stop and see me; and I sure do like that. This summer I gave all of my young out-of-

town visitors autographed pictures. So you birds who don't want to spend ten cents for a picture now know how you can get one for nothing.

And to prove to me that I'm not the only geezer in the world who writes stories, Leon Trometer, 60 Donaldson Rd., Buffalo, N. Y., has sent me an example of his work—and I want to tell you it's bully good stuff for a boy. I only wish that I had the space here to publish it, just as he wrote it. He also submitted a poem. But while that, too, was good in spots, it didn't quite get across. I dare say I'll hear from this young chap again.

"My idea of solid comfort," writes Robert Barker, 167 Cherry St., Elgin, Ill., "is a big chair, plenty of time and a Jerry Todd or a Poppy Ott book. Your books teach boys and girls the right way of living coupled with clean fun. If our Scout troop makes a totem pole for camp, as has been suggested, we may call it 'The Tittering Totem,' as a compliment to your book of that title."

POEMS

AND now let us give our young Longfellows and Miltons the center of the stage.

William Stevenson, 622 Lakewood Ave., Baltimore, Md., who wrote the following poem (for which he will receive an autographed copy of this book) tells me that he first got acquainted with my books when he read "The Waltzing Hen" as it was serialized several years ago in The American Boy. Here's the poem Bill pounded out in one of his most reckless moments:

Jerry Todd

Here is the story of Jerry Todd
  And all of his great gang.
Every time they see the Strickers
  Things then begin to clang.

Whenever they get sight of Bid
  Forward they start to go.
Soon all the air is filled with
  Tomatoes, cobs or hunks of snow.

Quite suddenly a cob hits Rory,
  A jolly little English lad.
And when he starts to fight—
  Oh, boy! does he get mad?

I hope you'll like my poem,
  Next time I'll write one better.
I need a little encouragement,
  So don't forget that letter.

Accompanying the next accepted poem is a dandy letter and also a picture of six boys standing in a row, swell-looking guys all of them. They constitute the Local Chapter organized by George Koelle.

"First on the left," writes George, who gives his address as 4828 Hazel Ave., Philadelphia, Pa., "comes Jack Binns (G. F.). I'm next (S. F.). Then comes my brother Jack (F. F.). Then Bill Pottenger (R. G.), Newton Green (L. G.) and Dick Brown (Right Eye). At the last meeting we had popcicles and cake—yum-

yum-yum! Our meetings are held each Monday afternoon at four o'clock."

And here is George's swell poem:

Books I Like

Three cheers for Leo Edwards,
Whose books, I think, are swell.
And now about the Jerry Todds
I am about to tell.

He had a gang of trusty friends,
Scoop, Peg, Red and himself.
And now I'll tell you of his books
That are upon my shelf.

The first's about a whispering mummy
And four Jupiter detectives brave.
The mummy from the museum was stolen,
And this they sought to save.

The second's about a rose-colored cat
That was sent to their feline rest farm.
And although they were very precautious,
The cat finally came to harm.

The third's called "Oak Island Treasure,"
And this is the very best one.
They turn a clay scow into a show boat
And get many shivers and fun.

The fourth book is very creepy—
It's about a strange waltzing hen,
And a strange, weird, yellow-faced Hindu
Whose trunk does so strangely open.

The fifth is about a talking frog
And an inventor named Mr. Ricks;
Also a crazy old soap-man
Who, they think, is up to tricks.

The next one's about a purring egg
That was laid by a dodo hen.
But they certainly got a big surprise
When the egg finally did open.

The seventh is called "The Whispering Cave,"
And it is very funny,
Where Jerry is about to be stewed;
And they find a tree full of honey.

In the next, Jerry Todd is a pirate,
And on every page there's a laugh.
Especially where the Strickers
Get an unwarranted rotten-egg bath.

The ninth is about an elephant
That has a tail, very small.
But one morning when they looked at him
He had no tail at all!

The next is called "Editor-in-Grief,"
And it is very queer
The way our small friend, whose name is Red,
Does mysteriously disappear.

So when you go to the book store,
Please look among the "E's,"
Till you come to Leo Edwards,
For with his books you'll be well pleased.

Willis Mulford, 1202 Octagon Rd., Fairview, N. J., is the author of this one:

Jerry Todd

If you are a clean-minded book-loving boy,
You should read about Jerry Todd.
For his stories you can't help but enjoy—
They are so thrilling and odd.

Take, for instance, the "Oak Island Treasure"—
It sure is a good tale.
From beginning to end it fills you with pleasure,
And when you are done you'll say: "That's a whale!"

That's the way with every one,
They surely are "red hot."
And they're all loaded up with fun,
Just show me one that's not!

And here's still another one about Jerry Todd, written by Ralph Cass, 789 Lexington Ave., New York, N. Y.

Jerry Todd

Jerry Todd is a story-book boy
Who has filled many hearts with hilarious joy.
Contained among these hearts is mine,
And of his books I now have nine.
Poppy Ott is a good writer, too;
Of boys like him there are few.
He's Jerry Todd's bosom friend,
And on each other for fun they depend.

I've read "Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief,"
In which book Jerry was the Chief.
Their "Bugle" news was going great—
Until Peg Shaw met his fate!

And now let us have one more. "I am enclosing a poem which I hope you'll use in the 'Chatter-Box' of your next book," writes Leonard J. Rosenfeld, 100 Clinton Ave., Port Richmond, N. Y. "You may be surprised to find that I do not speak meanly of the Strickers . . . the poem will speak for itself. I work in a large law office in Manhattan and your stories brighten up many quiet minutes in the shadow of mountainous filing cabinets.

The Strickers

Now, please don't think I'm loony,
But it seems I've got a hunch
That a lot of credit's due
To that rough-neck Stricker bunch.

They aren't the very best type of boy;
Their behavior's quite a tough proposition.
But they make our stories "tangled-up" and interesting,
By giving Jerry Todd some opposition.

Of course, they play the role of minor villains,
And we must sympathize with them for their part.

They take a load of "guff" when
our heroes pay them back,
And at scheming, Jerry's gang
is pretty smart.

Now, don't think that *I* like the
Strickers.
"I hate 'em!" And, boy, those
words are true.
But they make the Jerry Todd
books exciting.
The devil must be always given
his due.

And I'm mighty glad, Len, that you *did* write that poem. Bid's gang always gets the worst of it in the end. And I've often wondered if that was fair. I'm glad you see that the Strickers, as I use them in my stories, are necessary "story-book" material. Having a naturally kind heart I've always wanted to square things with Bid and his gang in the end. Alas, though, as this is a series-book proposition I dare say I'll never be able to realize my desires, unless it comes about in the last book of the series.

PICTURES

AND the wad of pictures that I have here! Man, oh, man! I'd like to say something complimentary about each and every one of them; but if I were to do that this "Chatter-Box" would be endless. I'll just hit the high spots, so to speak.

Alger Johnson, Jr., Box 132 Tewksbury, Mass., sends two pictures of himself, one in an airplane and the other standing with his hand on the plane's silent motor. I am to conclude from this, I suppose, that Alger is going to be a mail pilot, or something.

In the next picture I see Alvin H. Lybeck, 18431 Kingston Ave., Hollis, L. I., N. Y., holding a pet hen. Also I have a picture of Alvin's dog Snap. He says in his interesting letter that he has 4 goldfish, 1 turtle, 3 tadpoles, 1 frog and 1 lizard.

"I received my membership card in the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish," writes Brame P. Morrison, Wilson, N. C., who sends his picture. "The boys in my neighborhood wanted to know how they could join. I told them to read your books and find out."

Next comes a picture, in Scout uniform, of my old friend Howard Hoadley, 139 Laquineo St., Findlay, Ohio. A very interesting letter accompanies the picture, in which Howard tells about a trip that he took on his bike. First visiting his grandparents, he later spent some time on a farm owned by a cousin, where he and the neighbor boys had a grand time soaking their bare skins in a pasture creek. And, boy-like, he also tells about the swell things he had to eat. Both Howard and his brother are Freckled Goldfish.

And here's two boys in a tree, and next I see a girl on a bike, and below that in the pile of pictures a boy and a dog and still farther down a boy draped against a fence. And that's just the *top* of the pile! Well to make it

snappy, one of the boys in the tree is Vernon Harris, who lives on a farm, R. R. 5, near Des Moines, Io. Here's a poem he wrote:

Oh, Jerry Todd is full of grief,
For he is Editor-in-Chief.
They saved the owner for a friend
And got a motor boat in the end.

The girl on the bike is Betty Weier, 415 E. 43rd St., Indianapolis, Ind. The boy with the dog (he writes a three-page letter) is Bernard R. Feick, 5947 Chester Ave., West Philadelphia, Pa. I understand that Bernard belongs to a real snappy Freckled Goldfish Chapter. Then comes a picture of Nancy Wright, 6750 Oglesby Ave., Chicago, Ill. And the bird leaning against the fence is William Francis Dwinney, 5945 Chester Ave., West Philadelphia, Pa. Clinton Radcliff, 1943 Georgian Rd., Philadelphia, Pa., comes next. He has tousled hair, I see, and a dog. Next we have a family group—anyway it's a group. The biggest guy is Roy Dreker, 227 Quincy Ave., Kearny, N. J. Roy is fourteen, girls—combs his hair, too, and wears glasses which give him a very learned look. The smaller chaps in the picture are his brothers. And look who's here! Sam Densler of 132 Ilford Ave., North Arlington, N. J. All lit up in white duck trousers and holding something that looks like a marriage certificate—but I see, by reading his letter, that it's a diploma, Sam having just kissed the 8th grade good-by. "I received my card and button," writes Sam, "and I think they're a wow." Ah-ha! The next bird coming up for mention has a smile that extends to the northeast corner of his ears. Meet John Simmons, 8682 Vincennes, Chicago, Ill. "I have over a hundred books," writes John. "I like them all, but your Poppy Ott books hold my attention the longest."

Well, I think it's about time to start a new paragraph. Here's two pictures, one of John Geidel, Kimrock Lodge, Lac du Flambeau, Wis., and the other shows John's pony. Living in Chicago in the winter time, John spends his summers up north, where his dad runs a hotel. Friends of mine have been there, and they say it's a great place; and they tell me that John is a great boy, though rather quiet. Next comes a picture of Glen Sorber, 23 Ogden Ave., Harrison, N. J. "My father reads your books, of which I have the complete set of Jerry Todd," writes Glen. "He says he likes them very much." Thank pop for me, Glen. And now would you slant your eyes at Vernon Norman Espitallier, Box 7, Woodcliff Lake, N. J., all lit up in a military uniform. No, Vern isn't a general, as I first thought. He says in his letter (and is it long!) that he's attending a military school. "Having read your books," he writes in part, "I feel that you're a real pal to all boys." Which I wouldn't deny if I could, for that's exactly what I am, and

I'm proud of it. And here's a poem of his that isn't so worse:

There is a boy by the name of
  Jerry Todd,
Solving mysteries is his job.
He lives in Tutter, Illinois,
And he is a very smart boy.
So smart was he
That he cleared up the mystery
Of a missing boy
Who lives in Tutter, Illinois.
Here was the strange thing—
One night the boy went to a spring,
And he never came back
Until Jerry got on his track.

Well, well, well. I suppose it's perfectly all right for a future general to write poetry if he wants to. And here's the barefoot boy with cheeks of tan—anyway he's barefooted. Has a cat, too. His name, I learn, is Bob MacMillan, 75 Chauncey Ave., New Rochelle, N. Y. "I have the idea," Bob writes, "that I'm going to be a popular author like you. I'm writing a goofy book now!" Hey! What do you mean, you little squirt—saying in one sentence that you're going to pattern after me, and then talking about goofy books in the next? Gr-r-r-r! And what do you know about it! —he states later on in his letter that he's going to have a "Giggle-Box" in his books. And here's another grinner, Gordon Hanley by name, who lives at 79 Coligni Ave., New Rochelle, N. Y. Gordon makes an original suggestion. He wants me to put Scoop's kid brother into my Todd books. "If you could have him getting into trouble, or having bad luck like Tail Light," writes Gordon, "it would make the books funnier still. For instance, have him fall down somebody's cistern, or when they are going to Oak Island in the old scow have him tumble overboard or get stung with hornets." Some very exciting suggestions, I'll grant. Well, I'll talk with little Jim Ellery and see what he says about it. And under the next picture I see the word "me." But on the back of the picture is written, Wilbert Massman, 1436 Bertean Ave., Chicago, Ill. "I would like to become a Freckled Goldfish," writes Wilbert. And he adds that he has read each of my books eight times. It is plain to be seen that he is cut out for an electrical engineer, for he sends me a drawing of a telephone set that he made. "Gee," he laments in his letter, "I sure wish I could live in a little town like Tutter, where I could have real fun. Here on Bertean Avenue you have to keep off the grass, you can't climb trees, you can't do this and you can't do that. About the only place we can play is in my back yard, where I have a tent—an idea I got from one of your books." And, in conclusion, here are two pictures one each of George and Harold Andrews, Monticello, Indiana. Of course, there are many more pictures in the pile. But I'll have to let them carry over till the next "Chatter-Box" in TUFFY BEAN'S ONE-RING CIRCUS.

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

IN 1928 we organized a club called the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish. To-day we have upwards of 8,000 members. Poppy Ott started the idea. He had a similar club, you know, in his book called the "Freckled Goldfish." So, thinks I, if he and Jerry can have fun with the club, why not fix it so other boys and girls can join? Which we did, starting with one member. And now, as I say, we have thousands. All good Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott and Tuffy Bean fans ought to belong to this club. Nor will it cost you but four cents in stamps to join. Simply follow these rules:

(1) Write (or print) your name plainly.

(2) Supply your complete printed address.

(3) Give your age.

(4) Enclose two two-cent United States postage stamps or four one-cent stamps.

(5) Address your letter to,

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

In due time you will receive a unique membership card, designed by Bert Salg, also a membership button and instructions. All for four cents, mind you! But we always did give bargains at our store! For instance, think of getting one of my handsome embossed pictures for only ten cents! Autographed, too. Of course, I haven't heard any one say they're worth more than ten cents. But that's the price. Simply send ten cents in stamps to Leo Edwards' Secretary, Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1140 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

LOCAL CHAPTERS

AND no sooner had we started our Goldfish Club than dozens of boys popped up to inquire if they could start branch clubs. So it was to help these young organizers that we produced a booklet, which tells how to start the club, how to conduct the meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

The complete initiation is given word for word. Naturally these booklets are more or less secret. So, if you send for one, please do not show it to any one who isn't a Freckled Goldfish. The initiation will fall flat if the candidate knows what is coming. Three chief officers (Gold Fin, Silver Fin and Freckle Fin) will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any boy's home, so, unless a booklet is provided for each officer, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a Chapter. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (three two-cent stamps) or three for sixteen cents (eight two-cent stamps). Address all orders to,

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

CLUB NEWS

Betty Henszey of Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, has a club of thirteen members. I attended one of their meetings, and later planned to have them visit me at Hi-Lee Cottage. But they put off coming till I had started writing, and then, of course, they felt they shouldn't come and disturb me. Earlier Norman Wengert came out from Milwaukee with his Goldfish club, composed of seven members, all dandy boys, as I learned when I dropped in on them one night when they were having a meeting. Here is a copy of Norman's report on that meeting: "We were honored by the presence of our Exalted Fantail, Leo Edwards. He arrived at Wengerts' about five-thirty. At six o'clock the club had supper at Wengerts.' Curt Hoerig was excused because of his uncle's death. The meeting was called to order at seven-fifteen. F. F. read the minutes of the last meeting. Dues were paid to S. F. Report on the pins was given. F. F. received four dollars to pay for the pins." Then Norman follows with a report of their fourteenth meeting: "Meeting started at seven o'clock. Curt was absent. Members played horseshoes. Norman Wengert was champion. Randall Lewis was tennis champion." Should you care to get additional information about Norman's successful club, write to him at 2651 Grant Blvd., Milwaukee, Wis.

"I received your little booklet telling how to run the Freckled Goldfish Club and was well pleased with it," writes Edward Whitty, 253 Buffirtog St., Fall River, Mass. "Danny Murphy is G. F. and I am S. F. Tom Kelly, a friend of ours, who isn't a Freckled Goldfish, is interested in Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott. And when he heard about our Local Chapter he said he would send for his card and pin. We are using his barn for the club and have meetings every Friday night at seven-thirty. We pay one cent a week. We have robes, too. I got my teacher in school to read 'Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot' and 'Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog' to the scholars. Danny and I made a boat, calling it 'The Sally Ann,' after the boat of the same name in one of your books."

And here is a short letter from Joe Buckels, 1331 Jackson St., Vicksburg, Miss., in which he states that he has organized a Local Chapter and now has five members. The Chapter has its own club house and gymnasium.

"I know how Jerry feels about the Stricker gang," writes Carl Dreves, 253–24 Northern Blvd., Little Neck, L. I., N. Y., who, together with his pal, recently joined the club, "because there is a gang somewhat like them around here. Once when they raided our hut, not having eggs or tomatoes, and being out-numbered, we used a garden hose. We have a new hut now, and the steak we cook in it sure does taste good."

"I sure was glad to receive the swell letter from you and my membership card," writes Edward Herman, Three Oaks, Mich. "The other kids around here, who have seen my card and button, are green with envy. I am introducing your books around here to get new members, so very soon I hope to have a Local Chapter."

One time a man, who knows blamed little about boys, asked me the silly question if my young readers, in sending me stamps for Goldfish membership cards, ever tried to gyp me. I told Mr. Inquisitive that I had yet to meet my first dishonest boy. The boys I know are frequently forgetful. But they are not dishonest. For instance here's a special-delivery, air-mail letter from Robert Koschnick, 1206 14th St., Santa Monica, Calif. The day after Bob ordered his membership card he discovered that he had sent only one two-cent stamp. So he spent fifteen cents to get the other stamp here on time. That's the kind of square-shooters I have in *my* gang.

And here's quite a long letter from an old friend of mine:

"Fellow Goldfish Members," writes Tommy Jensen, Riverside Drive, Beloit, Wisconsin. "I want to tell you about Leo's last birthday. I was invited to spend the week end with him at his cottage at Lake Ripley. Other guests were two young men from Illinois. Shortly after midnight the guests went to Leo's room, pulled him out of bed, gave him his birthday paddling and then threw him into the lake. Which wasn't a very dignified way to use an author! But Leo is one of the gang. Then, when noon came, on his birthday, he was given a 'shower.' Such presents! All-day suckers, lotion for sore spots (and he needed it, too!), neckties, tie-rack, etc. The Cambridge Boy Scouts came out with a big box, a huge box, in fact. It contained a smaller box, and in that was still another box, and so on. The house was full of boxes. And then, in a little bit of a package, Leo found the present."

Yah, I remember that birthday party! Boy, I sat on a pillow for a week.

"Gee, I'm proud to be a Freckled Goldfish," writes Robert Leibourtz, 2307 Avenue M, Brooklyn, N. Y. "When I got that card and button, and that peachy letter from you, I sure did put on airs. Man alive! You should have seen me. Having seen my card and button, the neighborhood kids wanted to join right away. So you'll probably hear from a lot of them. I've been reading 'Treasure Tree' and '700 Mouse Traps.' And are they peachy!"

"On June 25th," reports Betty Henszey, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, "our club had a picnic at Golden Lake Park. We took our lunch and went in swimming and boating. Gosh! We had fun! You should have seen the kids eat."

And here's a list of 37 names, all pupils in one of the Milwaukee,

Wisconsin, schools. This Local Chapter, under the direction of the teacher, Alice H. Potter, is undoubtedly the largest branch club that we have. And its organization is largely due to the efforts of that fine little pal of mine, Johnny Marx. Johnny tells me they have a meeting each Friday afternoon.

Which brings this "Chatter-Box" to a close. The next one will appear in TUFFY BEAN'S ONE-RING CIRCUS.

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JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
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